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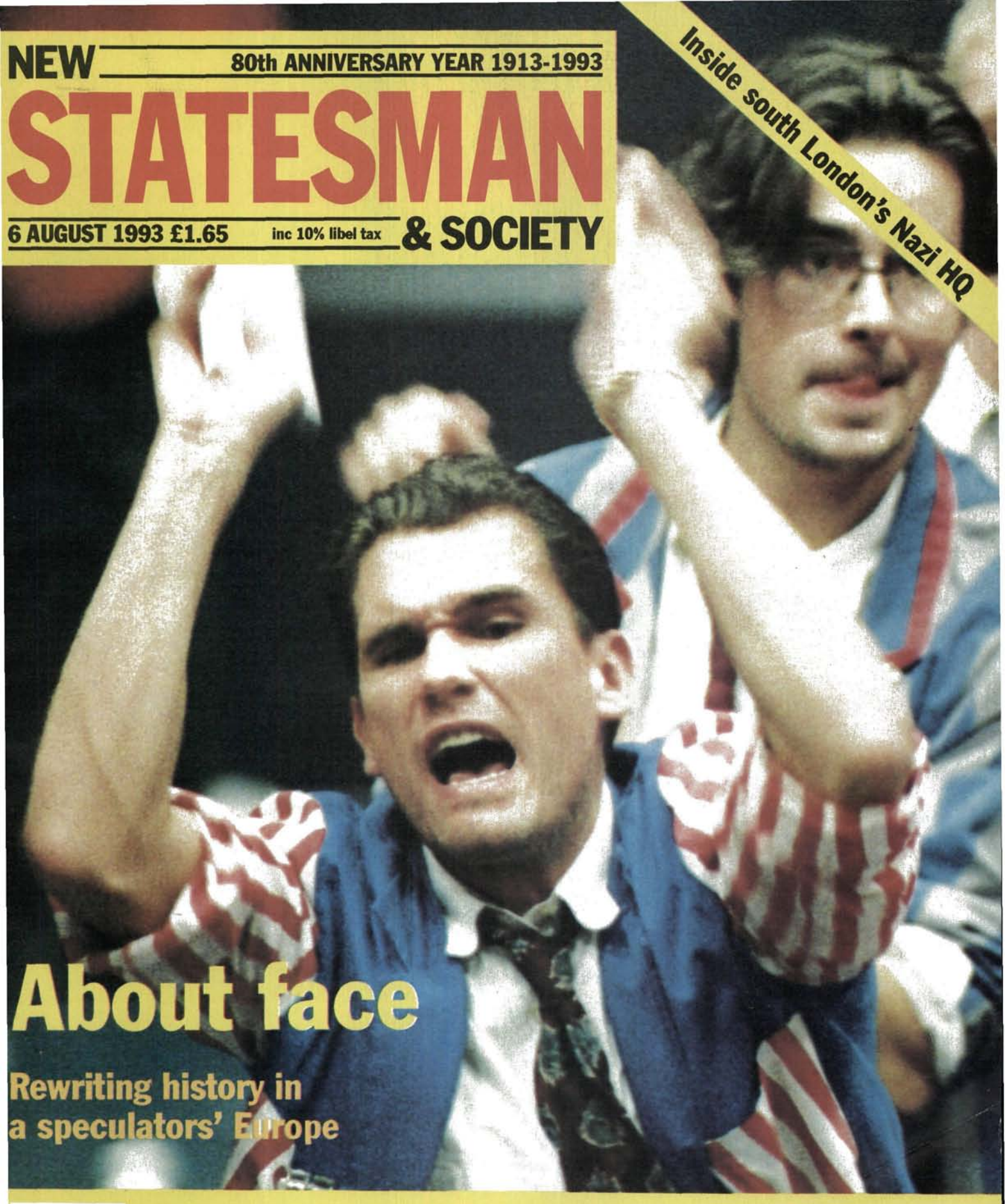
Inside south London's Nazi HQ



# About face

## Rewriting history in a speculators' Europe

PLUS: Pete May in the brothels of Kalgoorlie
Mat Coward: end of term at Westminster High School
Mary Kaldor: Crimean crisis; Max Farrar: My mugging
England's Cajun fever; Scotland's junk linguistics

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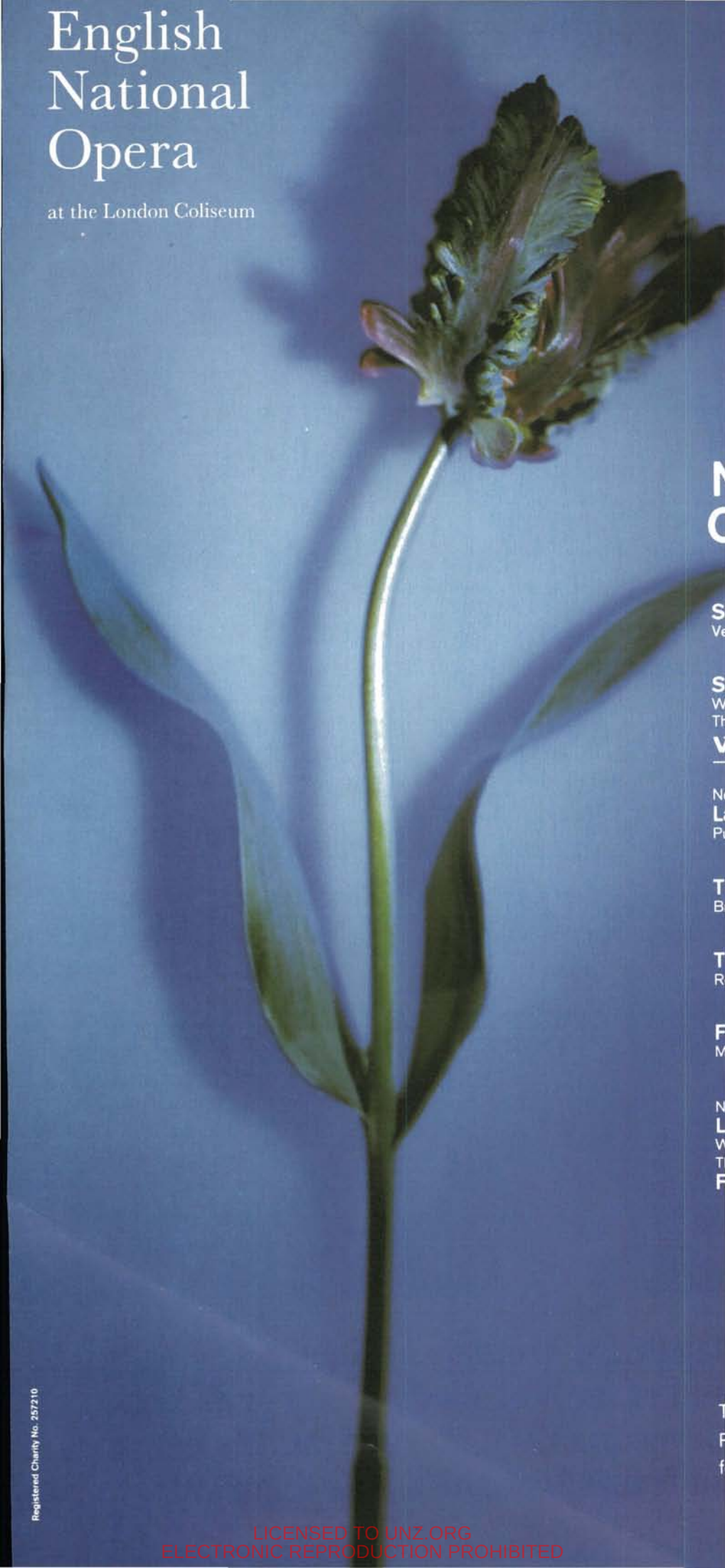
# English National Opera

at the London Coliseum



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**Cover: Associated Press**



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# Don't think—donate

A particularly encouraging postbag this week in response to our emergency appeal—more than £10,000 received in seven days. Our thanks to you all.

We are now almost halfway towards our £250,000 target. Please help us to maintain the momentum, by making a donation yourself, by encouraging others to do so, by publicising our position, and by organising fundraising events of your own—no matter how small or low key. Campaign materials, party packs, ideas, advice and assistance are all available from the defence fund coordinators, Nicola Baird and Nyta Mann, on 071 739 3211. You can also make credit card donations on that number.

A number of large fundraising events are in the pipeline for the autumn. Put the following dates in your diary now:

**Tuesday 14 September** "Erosion of dissent" public meeting at St James's, Piccadilly, 6.30pm

**Saturday 18 September** John Major Memorial Cricket Match, when an *NSS* all-star eleven plays a local side in the Prime Minister's own constituency, Huntingdon

**Sunday 19 September** Grand premier of Ken Loach's new film, *Raining Stones*, in the presence of Barry Norman, at the Camden Parkway, London NW1

**Friday 15 October** Friday night at the Brick Lane Music Hall. Three course meal and entertainment all-in for £25. Places limited to 130, so book now.

Much more is planned, including a "Stand Up For Press Freedom" comedy night, so watch this space—and keep the donations coming!

**If you think the libel laws are draconian; if you've donated or if you share the sentiments of Russian intellectuals then the Defence Fund's newest T-shirt (design courtesy of "The Oldie"), "Don't Think . . . Don't be surprised" catechism is for you. Available in black only: words are white.**

I want to live in a country that has a free press so that I can read what I choose. I want the law changed to stop printers, distributors and retailers being sued for libel. I want the NSS to survive.

I enclose a donation of £ . . . . . .

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Andrzej Krauze

# Last chance for Sarajevo

Four miles from the centre of Sarajevo, a final, savage battle is being fought for a few hills, which, if they fall to the besieging forces, will provide the gateway through which the Serbs will enter to cut the Bosnian capital in two. It is, as so often in Bosnia, an unequal fight. On the one side are tanks, heavy artillery, mortars and well-equipped infantry, reinforced and supplied from those regions of eastern Bosnia that have already been "pacified" in the ethnic cleansing of the past year. These are the Bosnian Serb forces, led by the inveterate ceasefire-breaker, General Ratko Mladic, their sights now set on the partition of Sarajevo to add to their military and diplomatic successes in securing the partition of Bosnia as a whole.

On the other side is a brave but raggle-taggle army of last resort—the Bosnian defenders, mainly but not exclusively Muslim, engaged in a last-ditch struggle to save their city. They are armed only with light weaponry: machine guns, rifles, pistols, supplemented with a few anti-tank grenades. According to Bosnian government sources, up to 500 of them have died in the past two weeks. The ground is littered with corpses; the intensity of the Serb bombardment makes it all but impossible to bury the dead.

These are the hills of Zuc, one of just two strategic areas of high ground overlooking Sarajevo that remain in Bosnian government hands. With the fall of Mount Bjelasnica confirmed earlier this week, only Zuc, to the north-west of the city, and Mount Igman, to the south, now stand between the Bosnian Serbs and their final objective.

In the skies above the battlefield, if they look up, the young men now dying in their hundreds in the trenches of Zuc may sometimes spot the instruments of their potential salvation. For since the UN-imposed no-fly zone came into effect over Bosnia in April, more than 5,000 sorties have been flown by Nato aircraft. They haven't halted the Serb advance; they haven't even halted the Bosnian Serbs' use of helicopters in troop and supply movements. But they have provided a reminder of what could be done to lift the siege of Sarajevo and other Bosnian Muslim enclaves if only the political will could be mobilised among the international community.

This week, Bill Clinton has again raised the possibility that air strikes could be employed against the Bosnian Serb forces. We have, of course, been here before, principally in May, when Clinton dispatched Secretary of State Warren Christopher to Europe to discuss US proposals to provide arms to the Bosnian government and order air strikes in defence of the UN-designated "safe areas". Because Clinton promised not to go ahead without the support of his European allies, the governments of those countries, led by Britain, were given an effective veto on intervention. They duly used it.

As so often since the Balkan crisis began, Britain's role in getting Europe to wash its hands of any action in defence of Bosnia has been both craven and pivotal. John Major's answer to a question by Paddy Ashdown, on the day of the social chapter debate in the House of Commons, gave a succinct flavour of his government's dismissive—and disreputable—conduct in any discussions of what might be done to halt the war.

"Are Her Majesty's Government prepared to allow the city of Sarajevo to fall to the Serbs?" Ashdown asked at Prime Minister's Question Time. Major replied (and this is the entirety of what he said): "The right honourable gentleman is well aware of what I have said to the House on a number of occasions. He may be an enthusiast for putting troops in the middle of Bosnia; I am not." So that's it, then.

Or it might have been had it not been for US and European public opinion—and for Bill Clinton. In Britain, the pressure from the likes of Paddy Ashdown—and from television news and documentary-makers, and papers such as the *Guardian* and *Independent*, now running a sustained "Save Sarajevo" campaign—has helped ensure that calls for action cannot simply be set aside in two-sentence dismissals by the Prime Minister. In the US, while the motives of the administration may be mixed (a desire to remove the impression of indecision being perhaps as powerful as any humanitarian impulse), the instinctive feel of Bill Clinton and his advisors in favour of intervention has now been matched by hard intelligence about its military practicality.

This is the only question that matters: can it be done? And the answer that is being received from the military is, increasingly, a resounding "yes". The limited objective of saving Sarajevo and the remaining Muslim enclaves, and of ensuring the safe passage of humanitarian relief convoys, is well within the capacity of the allied forces. Indeed, very senior military sources on the ground in Bosnia say that Sarajevo and its surrounding supply routes could be secured by the deployment of as few as 1,800 UN troops, together with the requisite air cover.

This combination of public pressure and the mounting evidence that limited, clearly directed intervention is a militarily feasible option is at the root of the US success this week, in contrast to its efforts in May, in getting its European allies finally to consent to a much tougher response to continuing Serb aggression. But there remains a major (and Major) question of will: a will that has been found lacking in the past, and that the Serbs will no doubt test to the limit, should the air strikes agreed in principle this week actually go ahead. Of one thing we can be sure: if the will is again found lacking on this occasion, there may never be another opportunity to test it in future—Sarajevo will have fallen.



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# Pollwatch

| Organisation | Date | Sample | Con% | Lab% | Lib Dems% | Other% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ICM/Guardian | 7 July | 1,424 | 28 (27) | 42 (43) | 23 (25) | 6 (5) |
| Gallup/Daily Telegraph | 9 July | 1,067 | 24.5 (25) | 43 (49) | 26.5 (23) | 6 (3) |
| Gallup 9000/ Daily Telegraph | 9 July | 9,741 | 24.2 (26.8) | 45.8 (44.2) | 24.5 (23.6) | 5.6 (5.5) |
| MORI/Times | 29 July | 1,689 | 27 (-) | 44 (-) | 25 (-) | 4 (-) |
| MORI/Sunday Times | 1 August | 1,047 | 27 (29) | 41 (44) | 28 (22) | n/a |

*The previous month's polls are given in brackets*

The Lib Dems have got more than their stunning victory in Christchurch to celebrate. Two national opinion polls have now put them ahead of the Tories. Last weekend's MORI/*Sunday Times* poll may have been affected by post-Christchurch euphoria, but the Gallup/*Daily Telegraph* poll of 9 July also relegated the Tories to third place.

MORI's survey of regional voting patterns is even more revealing. On the eve of the Christchurch by-election, a poll for the *Times* gave the Lib Dems a rating of 35 per cent in the south of England, 12 points up on their general-election figure. Support for the Tories in the south slumped from 48 to 31 per cent over the same period. A few days later, MORI's *Sunday Times* poll put the Lib Dems in first place in the south with 38 per cent; Labour second on 31 per cent; and the Tories trailing in their heartlands on 30 per cent.

This shift in voters' preferences suggests that the rout of the Tories in Christchurch cannot be dismissed out of hand as a protest vote. The Lib Dems are particularly excited by the regional concentration of their support, as it is the only way to win seats under first past the post. They are now hopeful of picking up a few seats for the first time in next June's European elections. Previously, such huge constituencies were out of their reach.

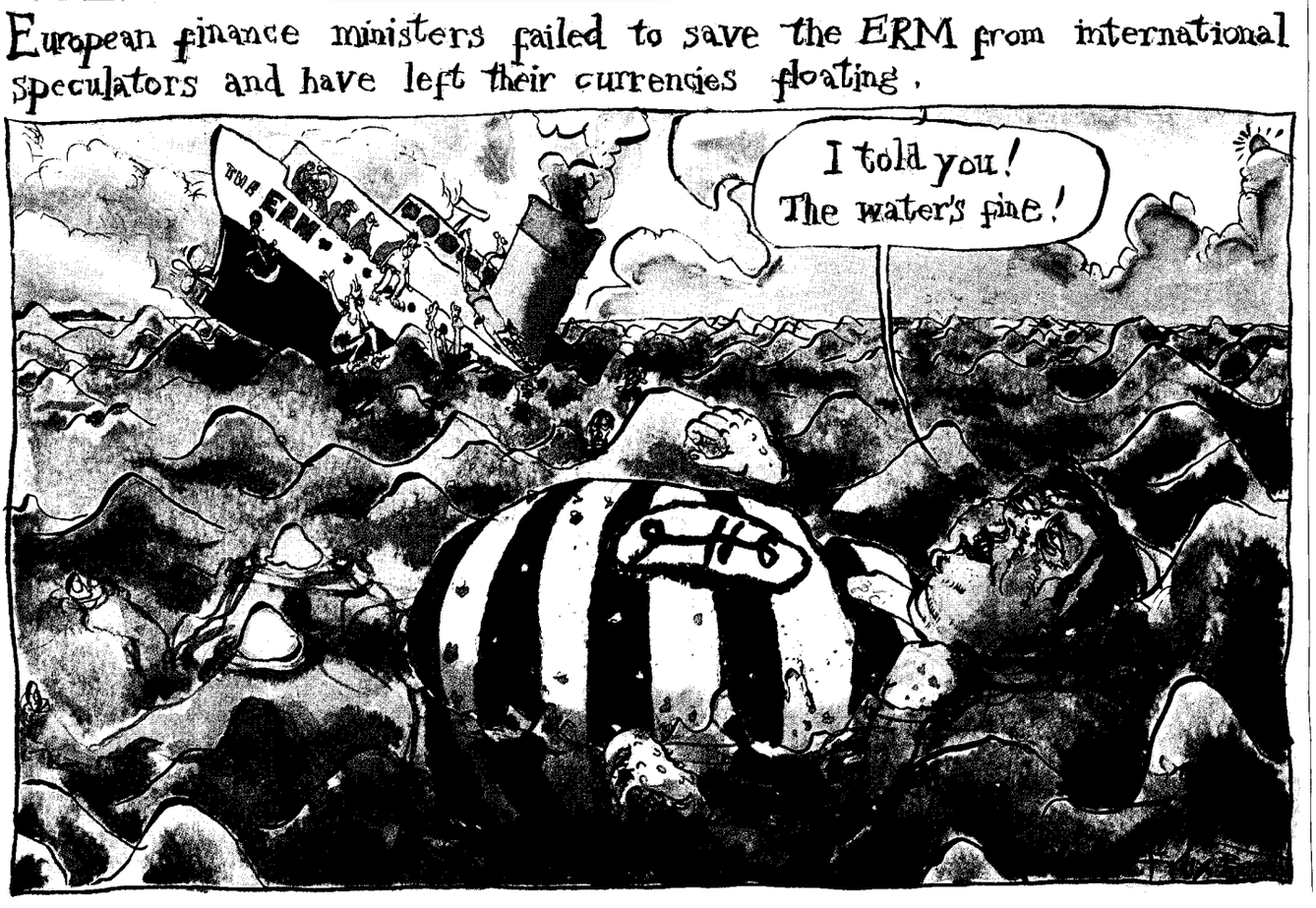
John Major continues to be a serious drag on his party. The reasons are familiar: incompetence and dithering. But the ICM poll for the *Guardian* of 7 July suggests that the Prime Minister is also losing his reputation for integrity. When asked whether Major was "straightforward or devious", 47 per cent of respondents said the former; and 46 per cent the latter. The "sleaze factor" may finally be having an effect.

While the Labour Party remains comfortably in the lead, all but one of the national polls recorded a slight fall in its ratings in the past month. John Smith's personal ratings are also on the slide: the MORI/*Times* poll found that 39 per cent of people were dissatisfied with his performance as leader (down three points); and 36 per cent satisfied.

The "listening" Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, may like to take note of the Gallup/*Daily Telegraph* poll of 12 July, showing that 43 per cent would be prepared to pay higher taxes in order to cut the deficit. Only 35 per cent would prefer the government to cut public spending. Among Tory supporters, however, these figures are reversed, with 47 per cent arguing for public-spending cuts. Three-quarters of voters (73 per cent) believe ministers deliberately concealed the likely size of the deficit at the last election. No one likes tax rises, but Gallup found that people could live with an increase in the standard rate of income tax and the abolition of mortgage relief. They did not want the NHS, education and pensions to be cut.

Confidence in the legal system has collapsed, according to a MORI poll for the *Sunday Times* on 25 July. Only 29 per cent have faith in British justice; and 54 per cent do not, a figure that has doubled in four years. Support for the police, however, has held firm in recent years, after nosediving in the 1980s. Sixty per cent are satisfied with the performance of their local force, a figure that will please the police as they wage war with the government over the Sheehy report.

## FELIX BENNETT


European finance ministers failed to save the ERM from international speculators and have left their currencies floating.
THE ERM
I told you! The water's fine!



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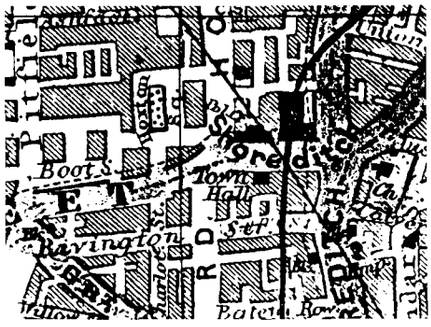
## SHOREDITCH




**Only five years after the Labour Party Young Socialists section was effectively shut down for being riddled with Militant supporters and being too bolshie in general, Labour's moves towards setting up a less unruly youth section are gathering apace. Young party members have just been sent a survey asking them questions such as: "What do you think the Labour Party should do to win the next general election?" (answer in three lines only, please). Unfortunately, the search for a nineties-style name for the group is not going so well. A readers' competition in Labour Party News has only turned up unusable suggestions like The Hardies (in memory of Keir Hardie), Phoenix (which brings to mind the unhelpful image of today's Labour Party lying in ashes), and Labour League of Youth (alarmingly Oswald Mosley-esque). Ian Howarth, National Youth Officer at Walworth Road, is open-minded as to whether the new name will contain the word "socialist"—despite the S-word having attracted the wrong sort of person to the party in the past. "We'd like to have the word socialist in there, but no one's come up with anything suitable yet," he tells Shoreditch. "If NSS readers want to have a go, we'd be glad to consider their suggestions."**

Following the squabbling over the rights to his body reported here last week, Ken Livingstone wishes it to be known that he has, for once, received an offer he can refuse. BBC Radio has invited the MP for Brent East to appear on *Harry Hill's Fruit Corner*, a new Radio Four comedy show. "We are preparing a script in which various insects, rodents and small forest life compete before an international jury," the request from Light Entertainments producer Jon Magnusson goes. "We would be honoured if you would make a guest appearance as a newt." Livingstone, famed for his love of the small amphibians, has regretfully turned the part down. Environmentally conscientious as he is, playing a small damp green thing would be taking things too far.

**Brent's barmiest days look as if they may soon be behind it, due to a split in the London borough's ruling Conservative group. NSS readers doubtless remember the tortuous history of the originally hung council, with a number of Labour councillors being "turned" by Tory offers of committee chairmanships and spacious town hall offices. But even members of the Tory group have decided enough is enough; seven of them have formed their own Constitutional Conservative Group, which means the official Conservatives no longer have a working majority. The formation of the breakaway group follows Tory leader Bob Blackman's continued support for councillor Nkechi Amalu-Johnson—the most notorious of the Labour defectors—who is currently facing 16 charges of fraud. Amalu-Johnson's other eccentricities include her support for female circumcision, and her heartfelt admiration for both Idi Amin and Margaret Thatcher. There's no loony like an ex-Labour loony gone bad.**

Mark Thatcher has been causing trouble for the St Ives Labour Party. All right, all right, not the *actual* Mark Thatcher, but the marginally less offensive *Spitting Image* puppet of the man. The puppet was originally donated to Roy Bland and the St Ives Labour branch way back in 1985, to auction off in aid of striking miners. Events overtook them, however; the strike ended, and Bland later left the party—which sparked off a bitter eight-year custody battle over the dummy son of Thatcher between the local branch and its ex-member. Matters came to a head last week, when constituency secretary Eddie Seymour forestalled a due court appearance over the affair by rooting out the puppet and attending a Checkpoint Charlie-style handover, meeting Bland in the neutral territory of the local car park. "I was brought in as an honest broker to resolve the matter. If Roy had only approached me in the first place, he would have got the puppet back ages ago," he wearily tells Shoreditch. "But then, Roy is a mite, er, *undisciplined* to be in a political party."

**Our congratulations to the 17 Eastbourne dustmen (see NSS, 23 July) on winning a legal victory that could spell doom for the Tories' flagship policy of compulsory competitive tendering. The dustmen lost their jobs when Eastbourne council privatised its refuse services. But under obscure, EC-inspired "Tupe" regulations, they should have been taken on by the new private-sector employer—and, last week, the employment appeal tribunal ruled in their favour. "We're saving the celebrations 'til our members see some money," says local T&G official Alan Green, who has another 14 members lining up to claim compensation. Parliament may have kicked out the social chapter, but those Eurocrats are still finding ways to get their paws on our nice free market . . .**

. . . And commiserations to London's Sisterwrite bookshop, which is closing down this weekend after 15 years, due to the latest recession and mainstream competition. Britain's first women's bookshop, and with its own cafe, feminist library, information centre and reading room, it was one of Shoreditch's favourite browsing spots. We shall miss it.

## FOURTH ESTATE

*A regular monitor of the tabloid press*

**30 July:** "Paddy whacks the Tories," reports the newspaper most loyal to Major, the *Daily Express*, as the votes are counted in the Christchurch by-election. The *Sun* hails "ex-commando, Paddy 'Killer' Ashdown" for carving "another notch to his gun", and mocks party chairman, "Sir Norman Fooler" for pretending the Tories could win. The *Mirror* disinters the hoary all-purpose headline: "Major Fiasco".

**31 July:** Lord Tebbit tears into Major in the *Daily Mail*. "Labour's Tony Blair is tough on crime. John Major secures the release of convicted drug criminals," he seethes. "Whatever anyone else says, the by-election at Christchurch *is* a disaster for the government."

*Today* reveals that Major "plans to go before he is pushed" next summer, if his fortunes do not improve. He has admitted this to "close aides", we are assured.

**1 August:** Major is warned to "forget about tax increases," by the *Mail on Sunday*. "They would tear the Conservative Party apart and paralyse the government." Instead, it recommends "tough decisions to cut the deficit", as if the Tories are any more united over them.

John Junor is impressed by Major's "robust language" in the Bastardgate tapes, but rival *MoS* columnist Victor Lewis-Smith smells a rat. Major must have known that he was being recorded and it was all "a cynical exercise" in bolstering his image.

**2 August:** The *Mirror* devotes five pages to the ordeal of the "kissing cousins", David Rowbottom and Tania Miller, at the hands of Kurdish rebels. They were tracked down by resourceful *Mirror* journalists who even managed to snatch a photograph of Rowbottom washing in the nude. The headline? "Stripped of their freedom."

**3 August:** The *Sun* carries a picture of a dodo on its front page with the caption, "Wiped out like Maastricht". Its hate campaign against Norman "Lasher" Lamont is now at an end. The ex-Chancellor has "emerged as the new leader of the Tory right and a dangerous threat to John Major's premiership", it writes admiringly. The paper also gives Norm a chance to have his own say. "Maastricht is dead," he gloats.

The *Mirror* exults: "The bastards have been proved right. Mr Major has been proved wrong. WRONG about the ERM. WRONG about Maastricht. WRONG about the policies he held most dear." In that case, so has Labour, but the *Mirror* is too polite to mention it.

**4 August:** "Maggie takes her revenge," warns the *Daily Express*. She is to name the ministers whose "treachery" brought her down, it reports. Her main targets are Ken Clarke and Chris Patten, but will Major really be spared? We'll have to wait for the screening of the BBC series, "The Downing Street Years".



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## Sean French on British TV, Anglo-Saxon language and English manners

**The bold decision by the new head of BBC1, Alan Yentob, to acquire the rights to "This Is Your Life" for £3 million has received wide coverage.** Some reports mentioned that the British version of the programme began on BBC1, but the circumstances of this first shift of channels have not been mentioned.

Between 1960 and 1969, the director-general of the BBC was Hugh Greene, the brother of Graham Greene. He made the personal decision that, though it was popular, *This Is Your Life* was simply not the sort of progamme that the Corporation should be making, and he dropped it. This was in the old, snobbish days when the BBC was, as the current director-general, John Birt, would see it, unresponsive to the tastes of ordinary people. Hugh Greene, a cultured, literate man, placed much importance on the development of writers. He gave great prominence to *The Wednesday Play*, which made us aware of writers like David Mercer and Harold Pinter, and attracted great controversy. He also presided over the launch of *Steptoe and Son*, which soon attracted an audience of more than 20 million viewers, *That Was the Week that Was* and *Till Death Us Do Part*.

Marmaduke Hussey has said in the BBC's new annual report that the major responsibility of the Corporation is to become accountable. Note, incidentally, how the language of the left has once again been purloined by the right. Accountability was a buzz-word of Tony Benn, and it was never precisely clear what he meant by it. Nor, judging from Hussey's record, is it clear what he means by accountability, unless he means "run by accountants".

In broadcasting, accountability is a word used only as a political weapon. The real responsibility of an organisation like the BBC is to make good programmes. *Steptoe and Son,* a sitcom about two rag-and-bone men wrangling with each other week after week, could never have arisen out of a system that makes policy by opinion poll, and tries to buy ratings by signing up what has already been successful. The dismal irony is that it was the old, unresponsive, civil-service style that produced programmes that were both revolutionary in content and spectacularly popular.

Yentob's decision is truly bizarre. Couldn't he at least have thought up something just slightly different and given it a new name? At least that would have saved £3 million of our money. Yet it should best be seen as part of a change of culture that is not confined to the BBC or even to broadcasting. Don't train your own staff and expect long service. Keep everybody on short-term contracts, and fill the top jobs with people who have already proved themselves in some other activity. Don't think up your own ideas. Steal, or, if necessary, buy, other people's.

**I happened to browse through Michael Tracey's biography of Hugh Greene (which doesn't contain the "This Is Your Life" story), but I was struck by the following paragraph, which was prompted by Harold Wilson's feud with the Corporation.** "The BBC is a creature of the monarchy in that the governors are formally appointed by the monarchy and in turn appoint the director-general. For any government to interfere with the BBC directly would have been to guarantee a major political and constitutional crisis."

The passage made me turn instantly to look up when on earth this could have been written. In fact, the book was published in 1983. It is difficult to imagine any media commentator writing today about the BBC as a sacrosanct part of the British constitution, immune from direct political interference. Still less would the Corporation's independence be explained by the decisive influence of the monarchy. Yet Harold Wilson's means of subverting Hugh Greene, as explained by Tracey, has a modern enough ring to it: "Wilson had realised that the only way to change the BBC was to suffocate Greene slowly by providing him with a chairman with whom he could not work." This chairman, appointed by a Labour prime minister as one of his more sour jokes, was Charles Hill, then chairman of the Independent Television Authority and a former Conservative Postmaster General.

Wilson is being spoken of again as a Labour leader who was an adept handler of broadcasting and the press but, as Alan Watkins has pointed out, his media policy consisted largely of sourly watching the telly with Gerald Kaufman. (Those evenings are high on the list of historical occasions at which one is deeply grateful not to have been a fly on the wall.)

I know that Ben Pimlott's recent biography was intelligent and persuasive and all that, but could we please not let the Wilson revisionism get out of hand.

**One of the few interesting results of John Major's leaked "bastards" speech has been a discussion about modern manners.** I'm a qualified admirer of Clare Short, but I was astonished by her prudery when she was discussing the issue on last week's *Any Questions*. She argued that swearing was wrong, because of its implied violence, and she utterly dismissed the argument that it was reasonable that Major should speak in a different manner privately from how he did in public.

Apart from being disturbingly irrelevant to what life is like (no small problem for an important member of a major political party), Short also seems to ignore the fact that swearing is a linguistic skill, almost an art, that needs to be performed with delicacy. It is a sociological fact that we need to adjust our language in all sorts of ways to different settings. One of the most brilliant recent compliments I have come across was made by David Sylvester on the death of Francis Bacon: "He never unintentionally caused offence." At first I thought it was a misprint, but then I saw what he meant. When swearing, the point is to have some sense of the effect you are having. Offend people, if you must, but do it deliberately.

Unfortunately, *Any Questions* got diverted into the familiar, jejune arguments we all know about swearing and said nothing about manners, which is an authentically complex and deep subject. The liberal hero of Tom Stoppard's finest play, *Professional Foul*, argues that most international disputes are caused by breaches of good manners. In the end, though, he himself has to make a series of breaches of good manners, against his communist hosts, against his professional colleague, in order to do what is right.

I love reading instruction books about manners, those primers on knives and spoons and modes of address that are necessarily works of sociology because the advice must also be a form of analysis. I love the American *Miss Manners' Guide*, which tells you with icy, witty precision what to do if the man opposite you at dinner has spinach between his teeth (tell him) or if you have given your sexual partner gonorrhoea (flowers).

I love them when they are Machiavellian and sly. A new example, the *Bloomsbury Guide to Good Manners* by Nigel Rees, is simply weird: "For women publicly to adjust their make-up with a mirror or literally to powder their nose, is to indulge in a form of sexual display—or, rather, to engineer a form of sexual display which may in its final form be acceptable but which should only be prepared privately." Come off it, Nige.

One of the most interesting observations about English manners was made by the great American literary critic, Edmund Wilson, when he visited Europe just after the war: "In other countries, manners are intended to diminish social friction, to show people consideration and to make them feel at ease. In England, it is the other way: good breeding is something you exhibit by snubbing and scoring off people."

Because of this, the debate about manners in this country is not just moral but political. To use manners in Britain as a way of putting people at their ease is virtually a revolutionary act. After all, who is the Briton with whom people feel most ill at ease? The Queen, of course. QED. I apologise to Alan Yentob and Nigel Rees for any offence that has been caused, and I would like to thank you, my readers, for your time.



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IAN AITKEN

# The rise of airbrush politics

Rewriting history is by no means a novel activity among practising politicians. Indeed, the late Joseph Stalin raised it to the level of a growth industry, and the airbrush replaced the pen as the main tool of the trade. Not just Trotsky, but entire legions of Uncle Joe's unsuccessful rivals disappeared from the official Soviet texts almost as quickly as they disappeared into the cellars of the Lubianka.

Yet it is doubtful if any political rewrite men have ever attempted to refashion the historical record quite so soon after the event as John Major and his immediate colleagues. Even before the exchange rate mechanism finally ran into the buffers in the early hours of Monday morning, it was clear that an entirely new version of how Britain came to leave that ill-fated institution had already been constructed, and was about to replace our actual memory of that welcome event.

"We told you so," was the central theme of this respray job, in which successive ministers from the Prime Minister and Kenneth Clarke down to fresh-faced cabinet innocents like David Hunt set out to persuade us that our departure from the ERM was wholly due to the skilful foresight of the men in Downing Street and the Treasury. This version was buttressed by the posture of amused condescension, bordering on contempt, that Chancellor Clarke adopted on his arrival in Brussels on Sunday, and again on his departure on Monday.

Mr Clarke, to be sure, is a master of amused contempt. He does it very well, and usually disarms his victims by combining it with a certain thuggish affability. One could even claim that this facility—coupled with his undeniably high IQ—has been the principle weapon in his political armoury during his uninterrupted journey up the greasy pole ever since he got his first job in 1979.

But one suspects that even Mr Clarke's legendary affability will not, on this occasion, be enough to disarm the victims of his condescending contempt. Neither the Germans nor (more especially) the French are in any mood to put up with such treatment from a government that they have every reason to know was bundled out of the self-same ERM last September, in the most humiliating circumstances. To have such a person, however affable, say "we told you so" is to add the ultimate insult to the very real injury they believe they have suffered at the hands of "Anglo-Saxon speculators".

So why did Mr Clarke adopt this highly offensive posture? He is far too intelligent to be unaware of the likely reaction at the other end of the Channel Tunnel. Nor has he a record of Euro-scepticism of a sort that would cause him to take pleasure from tweaking the noses of the Frogs and the Krauts when their federalist objectives take a knock. On the contrary, devotion to the European Community, and Britain's place in it, has been a central plank in his personal political creed.

Unlike his predecessor, poor Norman Lamont, he cannot now hint that he was really opposed to the ERM all along, and was only doing as he was told when he tried to keep Britain inside it. It is just possible that there may be a few Tory MPs naive enough to believe such a claim from little Norman, even when confronted with the videos of his actual utterances at the time. But surely there are none so stupid or so ignorant as to believe a similar claim from Mr Clarke?

The answer, of course, should in logic be no, not one. But there is very little logic about the Conservative Party in the aftermath of last week's Christchurch by-election fiasco—indeed, there wasn't very much even in the weeks before it, when the Tories were kicking each other to bits over Maastricht. Now, post-Christchurch terror has persuaded many MPs to look towards Mr Clarke as a potential saviour. They see him as the only man who might possibly be able to engineer the same magical change of atmosphere as John Major achieved for them in 1992.

**In the rewritten history, the Thatcherites no longer wish to be held responsible for Lady Thatcher's successor**

Mr Clarke did not need John Smith to draw his attention to this phenomenon in the course of the Labour leader's effective speech at the end of the Maastricht confidence debate—the Chancellor knew it already. But he also knows that one of the biggest obstacles to his becoming the acknowledged alternative to John Major in an early leadership contest is his commitment to the European cause. He is well aware that hostility to the party's Euro-enthusiasts is not restricted to the Thatcherite diaspora. It is mainstream Conservatism now.

Which supplies a persuasive answer to our original question—namely, why Mr Clarke swaggered over to Brussels last weekend wearing that infuriating (to the French) smirk. It looks increasingly as if the Chancellor has begun the process of divesting himself of his well-worn European suit, and is now beginning to don a more fashionably Eurosceptical outfit. If there were such a thing as a Ken Clarke biography—and I bet some enterprising hack is already working on one—then the time would now be ripe for a new and entirely rewritten edition.

More extraordinary, however, is the apparent willingness of many died-in-the-wool Eurosceptics to swallow the idea that Mr Clarke is no longer, and perhaps never was, the kind of Europhile they detest with such bitterness. Strange to relate, even unreconstructed Thatcherites seem willing to see this notorious ex-Eurowet as an acceptable—no, a desirable—successor to John Major, and it now looks as if they are ready to pretend that he is at least an honorary "one of us".

No less an organ than the remorselessly Europhobic *Spectator* now hails Ken Clarke as the "pre-eminent figure" in the Tory party, and declares that he looks "more and more like a potential prime minister" with every day that passes. Amazingly, its deputy editor actually praises him for being the minister who dreamed up, and then forced through, the idea of a confidence vote as the only way of facing down the Tory Euro-rebels.

This seems to prove once and for all the accuracy of the familiar suspicion that true-blue Tories prefer a good spanking from Nanny to being allowed to run wild. However, a more authentic Eurosceptical reason for endorsing Mr Clarke's toughness is also adduced. But for him and his confidence vote, it is claimed, John Major would have done the unthinkable and ratified the Maastricht Treaty *with* the social chapter.

Harsh words, which suggest that matters are even worse for Mr Major in his own party than the opinion polls suggest. Indeed, it is possible to gauge just how bad they are by the fact that the Thatcherites themselves have taken to rewriting history. They no longer wish to be held responsible, even in part, for Mr Major's election as Lady Thatcher's successor.

Yet the facts are clear enough. It was the Iron Lady herself who selected poor, inadequate Mr Major as her preferred successor, because she saw him as the only candidate capable of beating Michael Heseltine. Having made the choice, she staged a spectacular personal campaign to drum up the votes in a whirlwind of telephone canvassing and arm-grabbing confrontations.

The truth is that the then Mrs Thatcher did more than any other individual to get Major the job. Not even Stalin's airbrush would have enough puff to expunge that from the record, however much she and her allies would like to forget it.



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# Peace through security

**Now the Israeli bombardment of Lebanon is over, the US secretary of state, Warren Christopher, is talking about using the ceasefire as a tool to break the deadlock in the peace talks.** He may be right. The main lesson to all parties at the end of "Operation Accountability" is that they don't have many choices. The only alternative to the peace process is war, and a bloody war at that.

It is still too early to assess how successful the 40,000 Lebanese soldiers, moved to the south of the country for the first time since the 1970s, will be in controlling Hizbollah. But the decision by the Lebanese government to send its army into the area (no doubt with Syria's blessing) was enough for Israel to halt the bombardment and allow local residents to return to their homes.

In Israel, Operation Accountability is considered a success—and some of her neighbours may feel the same, though they would rather not say so. If, as has been suggested, Syria's President Assad has been using Hizbollah as a proxy to exert pressure on Israel over peace talks, he may see the result as successful; and so may the Lebanese government. The reality is that Israel could not carry on its raids into Lebanon much longer; and if this short encounter helps break the peace deadlock, all parties will be winners.

The Israeli prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, knew that he was better off quitting while polls showed 93 per cent of the population supporting him. Arguments were developing within his coalition cabinet, and it was obvious that public approval would last only as long as it was clear that the government was controlling the situation, and that the operation was not turning into a ground war—which would have awoken old memories of the traumatic 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

The Israeli press kept reminding the government of the limits of its support. After the first couple of days, editorials started questioning the morality of the operation. As Meron Benbenisty wrote in the respected daily newspaper *Ha'aretz*: "It is not just the other side who must be made accountable, we too must be responsible for our own actions." An editorial argued that the need to protect Israeli civilians should not escalate into action against civilians on the other side.

But the Israeli government had found itself in a tight spot. The northern border was again becoming a problem. After six Israeli soldiers were killed in Hizbollah attacks over a very short period of time, Rabin decided contingency plans would have to be implemented.

By definition, a government's first duty is to protect its citizens. In a country like Israel, a government that is not seen to put security high on its agenda has no chance of survival, let alone re-election. Yet Rabin was the one who had promised to work for peace; and, with a coalition dependent on left-wing parties, he knew he could not ignore his election promises. He had to do something that would demonstrate a commitment to Israel's security; while at the same time not acting in a way that would jeopardise the peace process.

As a former chief of staff, Rabin knew his task was not an easy one. Hizbollah guerrillas operate in small, highly mobile groups, from changing locations. It is arguable how much support they enjoy among the civilian population of southern Lebanon; but they are able to find hiding places within minutes of launching their Katyusha rocket attacks on northern Israeli towns. All this, plus the fact that Hizbollah fighters are extremely suspicious, rules out the option of covert action against them. The other extreme—a large-scale ground offensive—could not be considered, given Israelis' traumatic memories of the 1982 Lebanese war.

Rabin resolved on a complicated scheme that, in effect, left the final act in the hands of others. The idea was to push civilians out of their homes towards Beirut, knowing this would put huge pressure on the Lebanese government. Rabin hoped the Lebanese would turn crying to the Syrians, who in turn would pressurise the Iranians. The result Israel wanted was an order from Tehran to Hizbollah to stop attacking northern Israel.

Only time will tell whether Operation Accountability has created more sympathy for Hizbollah, or isolated them as Israel hoped. Internally, Rabin achieved his goal. He showed the Israeli public that he is just as ready to act to secure all parts of Israel, including the border towns, as he is to take risks to achieve peace. Operation Accountability may even have prepared the ground for the territorial concessions that will have to form part of any peace agreement. Such concessions will be acceptable to public opinion only if Israelis feel secure.

Even if the Syrians and the Lebanese were responsible for creating the conditions that led to the Israeli raids—by allowing, if not encouraging, the Hizbollah attacks on northern Israel—both governments have gained points with the US by helping to negotiate the ceasefire. Now they will hope to be thanked for their efforts, through US pressure on Israel to make progress in the peace talks.

Operation Accountability has caused great suffering and destruction in southern Lebanon and northern Israel. Rabin claims it was a success, but "success" will be measured by the results of the Lebanese army's new move—and by progress in peace negotiations.

**Daphna Vardi**

## 30 YEARS AGO

**"The Mandy Club"**
**9 August 1963**

**Sir, in the "London Diary" of 26 July, reference is made to the old Birmingham school of Miss Mandy Rice-Davies. It is stated that the girls of her old school have formed a "Mandy Club".**

**This is not true, neither the Parents' Association nor the staff have any evidence of such a club being formed, and we should appreciate any proof that Karl Miller has of such a club. If he is unable to produce any reliable evidence of this, would you be good enough to withdraw such a monstrous statement, which is abhorrent to the parents of the girls concerned and to the girls themselves, who regard any reference to Miss Davies's connection with the school as an insult. Incidentally the school, which is well known for its achievements and its moral integrity, is not in Birmingham, but in Warwickshire.**

*Derek T Moody, Parents' Association*

# The Japanese coalesce

**After a fortnight of frenzied backroom bargaining in the wake of Japan's inconclusive election, the dust is settling and the new players in Japanese politics are beginning to emerge.** So is a new political scenario.

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which lost its majority with the pre-election defections of nearly 50 Diet members and failed to win it back at the election, must hand over the reins of power after 38 years to a hastily assembled coalition of seven parties and a batch of independents. Still by far the largest party, with 223 of the 511 seats in the House of Representatives (the lower house of the Diet), the LDP is short of the majority to ensure its president is elected prime minister when the house convenes this week.

Following Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa's announcement last week that he would resign, the race to replace him as LDP president saw more than the usual amount of factional canvassing. The party's young bloods had pressured the leadership into allowing a vote by ballot of all the Diet party members and prefectural delegates, instead of the usual decision behind closed doors.

But most of the initial contenders, including former premier Toshiki Kaifu, the provincial delegates' favourite, dropped out early, leaving a two-horse race between ambitious foreign minister Michio Watanabe, 70, and chief cabinet secretary Yohei Kono, 56. The ballot last Friday gave a clear victory to Kono, who left the LDP in 1976 over the Lockheed bribery scandal, before returning to the fold ten years later.

In the coalition camp, the choice for prime ministerial candidate has also focused on two men, both former LDP members: Morihiro Hosokawa, 55, founder last year of the Japan New Party (JNP) and grandson of Prince Fumimaro Konoe, a wartime prime minister; and Tsutomu Hata, main catalyst of the cur-



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rent political shake-up, who led his faction's defection from the LDP in June and went on to form the Shinseito party.

In party negotiations, Hosokawa was given the nod, and is now assured of winning the run-off with Kono to become Japan's next prime minister. Hata is tipped to be the new foreign minister.

But, as the statistics show, it is the flimsiest of coalitions, put together on an anti-LDP platform, rather than on common policies. That irony will not be lost on the socialist SDP, the largest of the partners. During its decades as Japan's main opposition party, the SDP persistently failed to form a united front with other parties of the left and centre. In July, the SDP saw its strength nearly halved to 70 seats. Now, however, it will have a share of power—in a pact comprising the very parties it could never agree with, plus new conservative factions led by politicians who were formerly rivals.

The SDP's days as an independent force in Japanese politics seem to be over, and the party's fate may now depend on coalition government. In an astonishing *volte face*, it recently diluted any distinctiveness it had by throwing out its time-honoured "non-military, non-alignment" defence policy. A draft "1993 Declaration" recognised Japan's self-defence forces as constitutional, and accepted the Japan-US Security Treaty.

The Japan Socialist Party (JSP) was rarely more than a conduit for anti-LDP protest. With trade union membership dwindling by 40 per cent in the past 20 years, much of its traditional support base has been eroded, though its fortunes rose briefly in 1990 under popular "madonna" Takako Doi. In 1991, following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the break-up of the Soviet Union, the party changed its name to the Social Democratic Party, dropping the now discredited "socialist" in an effort to improve its image. But its electoral performance this July was its worst ever.

Last week, the powerful Federation of Economic Organisations (Keidanren) said it would give financial aid to all coalition parties except the SDP, adding it would support the coalition as long as it maintains a market economy. The veiled threat is significant. At a recent seminar of corporate executives, 85 per cent said the LDP is still the party the business community should support. The bureaucracy and big business approve of the change of government because they see the coalition as essentially the same as the LDP—"one more horse hitched to the LDP wagon", as one commentator put it.

Not many analysts expect the coalition to last. Its policies on major issues, especially in key agricultural and fiscal areas, remain vague. But it is expected to push through electoral reforms, creating a mixed system of single-seat and proportional representation constituencies to give smaller parties a larger say. If the coalition breaks up and another election is called, the SDP could see itself reduced to insignificance—especially if the coalition fails to field joint candidates.

**Anthony Head**

## LETTER FROM BOLIVIA

**The boatman who was to take us to the camp was late, working to that mysterious chronology known as "Bolivian time".** We killed the hours sitting in a bar in Puerto Villarroel, drinking fizzy drinks. Outside, mangy dogs scratched themselves against squalid wooden houses. A boy passed with a pet boar in tow. Men unloaded empty beer bottles from a Mississippi steamer berthed at the docks. When we finally set off, the rainy season had begun with a vengeance. Large drops of rain stung as the boat sped towards Villa Yuqui, a camp set up by US missionaries to house the Yuqui tribe, who were, until recently, nomadic forest dwellers.

It is now thought unlikely that any Yuquis are still in the forest. Indeed, of Bolivia's 30-odd tribes, only one splinter group remains untouched and hostile to the outside world. This is partly the result of pressure on forest land from settlers and loggers. But it is also because two evangelical sects, the New Tribes Mission and the oddly named Summer Institute of Linguistics, have specialised in luring Indians from the forests and savannas of Latin America in order to convert and "civilise" them. Both organisations send young, often inexperienced missionaries to contact tribes. Their method is to establish camps in the jungle, cut rough paths into the forest, and leave gifts behind them. The aim is to settle the target tribe in the camp, which facilitates the process of conversion.

**If the US missionaries had not provided the tribe with a "gilded cage", the Yuquis would be extinct by now**

The Yuqui camp, an airstrip and a number of wooden houses, is surrounded by dense rainforest and a small banana plantation. We arrived at nightfall, as hundreds of fireflies were starting to glow intermittently in the trees. Visitors to the camp are discouraged, and Dr Allyn Stearman, an anthropology professor living with the Yuqui tribe, was brusque. We were to watch out for the snakes that came into the house from the nearby swamp. (She had recently found an anaconda nestling on the bookshelves.) There was enough running water to cook with, but not to bathe in. And the lights, powered by car batteries, would last a total of three hours, so we should use them sparingly.

The Yuquis lived in the forest for centuries, believing they were the only people on earth. They were perhaps one of the most primitive hunter-gatherer tribes known. They had lost the art of making fire, forcing slaves to watch over the embers at night. The tribe was nomadic and did not build shelters, only palms stuck into the ground. Their famous long arrows were accurate to just ten metres in the thick canopy.

Yuqui society was, and remains, violent. Dr Stearman told us of a man who had bitten off and swallowed someone else's finger. On another occasion, a man returning from a day's hunting had kicked his pregnant wife in the stomach until she aborted. She had neglected to prepare the evening meal.

In the harsh world of the forest, only the strong could hope to survive. The tribe needed to move constantly in search of game and to evade settlers. Those who could not keep up placed the whole tribe at risk. Yuquis practised infanticide by beating babies against trees; they left the weak and the old behind. The Americans were frequently shot at when they first arrived.

The missionaries brought the tribe into the camp in three waves: the first in 1965, the last just four years ago. Yuqui culture was beginning to die out. Traditional storytellers, adept at recounting tribal history without committing the taboo of mentioning the names of the dead (thereby invoking their spirits) were no more. The small number of hunters meant that every waking moment was taken up with the fight for survival. There were external threats, too. In the mid-1980s, eleven Yuqui men were found shot and laid side by side. The murderers—soldiers, loggers or settlers—were never found.

Bolivia's rainforest is being cut down at a faster rate than Brazil's. The wood is sold to Japan, the US and Europe. Latin American governments, wrestling with widespread misery and poverty, cannot put the interests of a few tribes above those of their desperate millions.

It is an undisputed fact that had the NTM not contacted the tribe and provided them with what Dr Stearman calls a "gilded cage", the Yuquis would be extinct. Yet the missionaries we met were bigoted, with no interest in or respect for native cultures. They have also been unsuccessful. In 27 years, not one Yuqui has been converted to the fundamentalist Christian faith.

Having lured the Yuquis from the forest, the missionaries also criminally failed to prepare them for the outside world. An internationally funded project run by Dr Stearman is trying to rectify the situation by attempting to make the tribe self-sufficient. Change itself is not necessarily evil. Try telling the Yuquis to return their prized mosquito nets, or to do without the free healthcare now available for their children. Those who seek to idealise indigenous societies, and preserve their ancient ways of life, are living in dreamland. Tribes that fail to meet the challenge of change will simply die out. For many, it is already too late.

We returned to Puerto Villarroel just as the rain was beginning to fall. The Bolivian anti-drugs forces checking river traffic gave us a cursory glance as we walked past the bars and foetid shacks. It was as if we had never left.

**Chris Phillpsborn**



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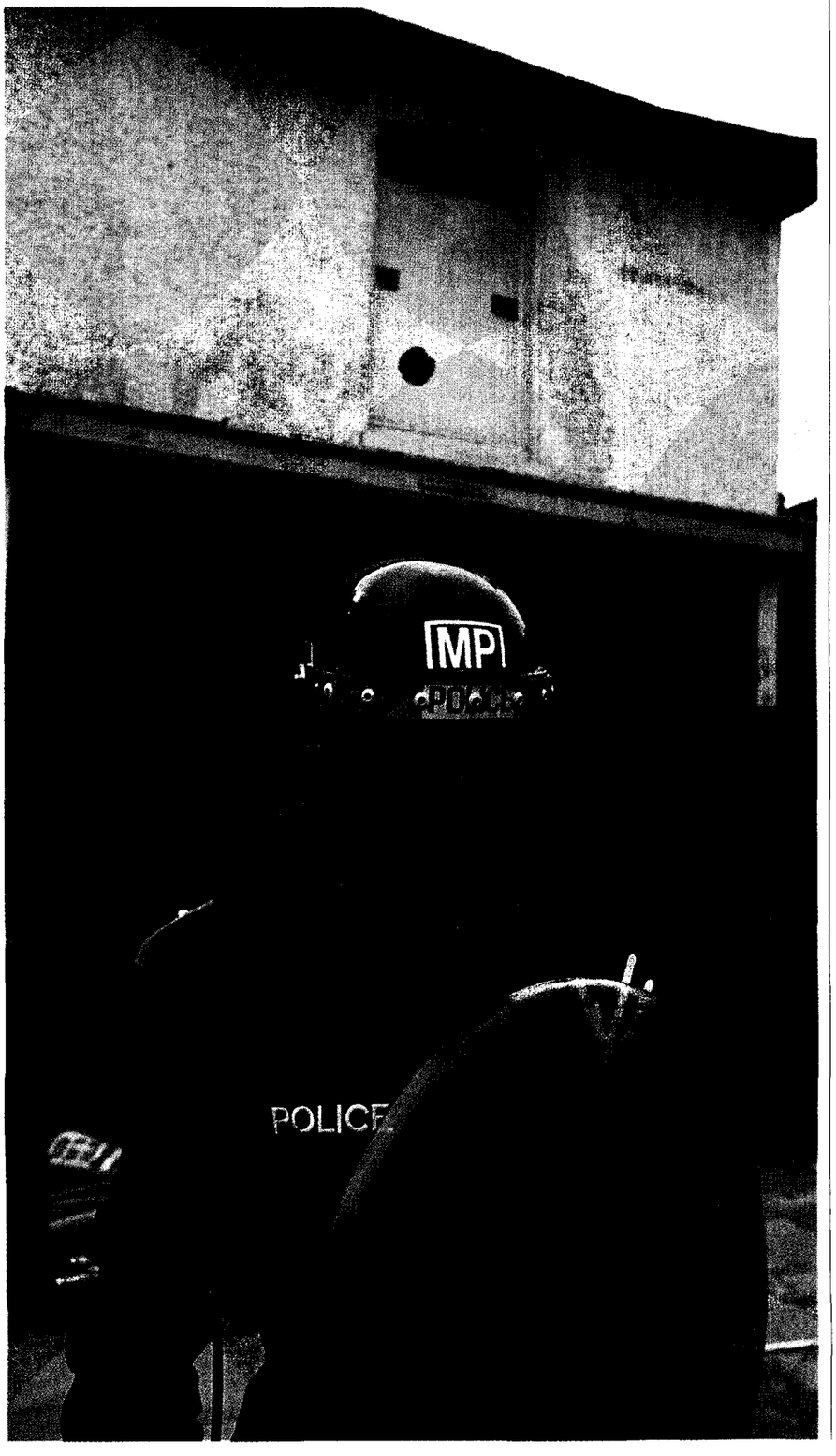
A boarded-up shop is at the heart of the growing racial violence in south east London. Here, a former British National Party member, **Tim Hepple**, tells of his time . . .

# Inside south London's Nazi HQ

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**Tim Hepple is a former football hooligan who was attracted to the National Front's radicalism but turned towards the British National Party because it was more active and violent. Then disillusionment set in, and he volunteered to work for the anti-fascist magazine Searchlight as a mole inside the most violent and dangerous sections of Britain's Nazi movement. Here, in the first of two articles based on a new Searchlight publication, "At War with Society" (£4 from Searchlight, 37b New Cavendish Street, London W1M 8JR), he describes his time as a worker inside the BNP's HQ, which, since opening in 1988, has been blamed for a big increase in racial violence in south east London.**

Officially, the British National Party building in Upper Wickham Lane, Welling, is not the party headquarters, just a shop. Its acquisition in late 1988 was one of the deciding factors in the decline of both the National Front and the south London British Movement. Many BNP supporters who are based there were originally in the NF or BM. The money to buy the premises came from BNP activists, who raised over £10,000, and a settlement of £18,500 that Richard Edmonds [the man who runs the BNP on a day-to-day basis] received after being sacked from his job at Cable and Wireless. The location at Welling was chosen because it was in a solidly Conservative area close to centres of BNP support in Greenwich. Welling, and nearby Eltham, are well known as "white flight" areas, where Londoners moved to get away from the immigration of the 1960s and 1970s. So there was, and is, a reservoir of sympathy, if not direct support, for the overt racism of the BNP.

John Morse [the leading BNP activist who was imprisoned alongside BNP leader John Tyndall over an article in *British Nationalist*] and Edmonds chose the shop after much thought; Morse told me they were very happy at the new Welling location. Upper Wickham Lane itself is very quiet, whilst the shop is served both by British Rail and a bus route, which runs along Upper Wickham Lane.

The shop made the BNP look more respectable and serious as a political party. It gave a new focus for activities in London and acted as an information centre and catalyst for the party nationally. Probably the single most important thing has been the public phone line. The number, 081-316 4721, is available from directory enquiries and is in the Yellow Pages, which means that not only can the public phone in, but also the cherished media. For the four months I was there the phone was constantly ringing, example enough of the new interest in the BNP. During the 1992 election, Edmonds and I had to pull the phone out of its socket in order to have a quick meal.

Do not believe the lie that the BNP is not gaining a lot of ground. *Socialist Review* might tell you that it has only 500 members, but the real figure is over 3,000. Subscriptions to *British Nationalist* number 400 to 450—I counted all the cards in Edmonds' old ice-cream box where he hides the subscription list—while at least as many subscribe to *Spearhead*. These are the bedrock of support for the BNP. They keep the wheels of the "well-oiled Nazi machine" ticking over.

The BNP receives a lot of mail, very little



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of it negative. On an average day, 50 letters will come in, and these, combined with phone calls, will lead to around 30-40 enquiry packs a day being sent off nationwide. The most popular item has got to be the range of stickers, while Malcolm Skeggs, who visits once a week, deals with the handful of requests for the BNP book service.

What are the areas of new support? Mainly the West Midlands, the north-west and the north-east, if the mail is anything to go by. One interesting area of support is a group of 30 British army subscribers to *British Nationalist*. *Spearhead* is sent out internationally to the USA, Canada, South Africa and Australia.

Working at the shop was a revealing experience. Many anti-fascists must wonder what goes on behind those dark blue shutters. The building is heavily fortified against attacks. The front door, which was reinforced during my stay after a half-caste lad had a go at Edmonds one night, has four metal bars bolted behind it that have to be removed before visitors can be allowed in, while the wooden shutters are two inches thick. Concrete walls two feet thick make up what were the shop windows on either side of the door, and a peephole in the middle of the door allows you to see who is standing outside. In March, Jim Guenigault, a drunkard and long-time BNP activist from Deptford, was called in to reinforce the door further at Jennifer Edmonds' [Edmonds' wife] request. You can hardly blame her for being security conscious, because on occasions she was left alone in the building late at night. Edmonds himself would boast that even a truck driving into the shop in a ram-raid assault would fail to cause serious damage. If an intruder did manage to enter, there were numerous implements to hand that could be used as weapons: four pickaxe handles for a start, as well as a number of fire extinguishers, whose contents were not for stopping fires.

One of the factors ensuring safety for the shop is routine. Visitors normally arrive at the same time every week, while volunteer helpers normally turn up at the same time each morning. Long-time activist Chris Collins, a friend of Edmonds since 1976, popped in regularly. Collins, now a key Combat 18 [BNP-organised paramilitary outfit] activist, was part of the hard core of the south London BNP team. My friends, Kerry, Jackie and Lee, would drop in on a Wednesday morning with their kids before going to the local mother and toddler group.

For events like the anti-fascist marches past the bookshop, arrangements are taken very seriously. Before the march in memory of Rolan Adams [the black youth murdered in a racist attack nearby], the local police chief paid us a visit in the shop and told us that he wanted a peaceful march (some chance) and that he wanted BNP supporters inside, not outside, the shop. As the BNP believe that the Jews control the top brass in the police force, it was vital to provide for our own defence.

The Friday night before the march, a group of us, including Simon Chadwick and Graham Tasker, who had come all the way from their home crime area of Chesterfield, as well as myself, Jim White and Dale Baker, a skinhead from Woolwich, slept overnight on the shop floor with our weapons in our hands. We had heard a rumour that left-wing students were to mount an all-night vigil outside and we were ready. We had decided that should there be any hint of trouble from anyone, we would attack first and ask questions later.

As it was, nothing happened, but nothing was left to chance. From 8am on the Saturday morning scores of BNP activists arrived at the shop with bags of tools and tear-gas. Another large group of 60 of us got into the pub next to the building, while a group of casual thugs drove around in cars. Yet another group attacked some marchers outside the notorious Abbey Arms pub, and students were attacked by Millwall fans in Deptford. I was glad I wasn't in the shop because there must have been over 100 people inside. All in all, there were at least 250 Nazis in the area that day, some of them BNP, and some autonomous groups of nutters, most likely from the British National Socialist Movement.

Edmonds and I had been on the phone the previous week ringing up as many contacts as possible. It amounted to a call to arms for the BNP and many supporters were all in favour of a head-on attack on the march. As it was, the skinhead group I was involved with got most of the action. We spent the early part of the morning storming around Welling terrifying the public, while after the march we took to the streets behind the HQ and quite by accident bumped into a massive cordon of police protecting the marchers, only 400 yards behind the HQ. They couldn't believe their misfortune and we couldn't believe our luck! We merrily sieg-heiled, chucked a few bricks and hurled abuse. The police went through the motions of warning us off but, as on numerous other occasions, they favoured us. That afternoon the Woolwich skinhead contingent won the tactical victory, much to the chagrin of a handful of east London casuals, including Alan Thomson, who had to even things up with a sickening attack on a mixed-race couple. Simon Chadwick and Graham Tasker helped out while screaming, "You race traitor!" at the terrified white lad.

Despite tasting blood, it was quite clear that elements of the movement were unhappy with the low body count on that Saturday and it is my belief that it was at this point that the criminal conspirators of Combat 18 stepped in and made their move. It is no coincidence that one of the main complainants about a lack of organisation was Simon Biggs, the violent Nazi skinhead from Penge, south London, whose reputation preceded him. Biggsy had spent a lot of time in prison and was a constant reoffender. He was more than happy to get stuck in and did so regularly. I witnessed one particularly bad attack while we were postering in Croydon one night with his friends Neil and Billy and their Staffordshire bull terrier Roxy. We were wandering around Croydon on the way to a rendezvous at a nearby pub, when they noticed a bearded character pulling down one of our newly put up posters. Immediately they sneaked over to the enemy, who was completely unaware of their presence, and set the dog on him. The dog did a good job and Billy particularly gave the guy a vicious beating. There was blood everywhere. I didn't feel much emotion. It was just another attack.

*Next week: Nazi literature and racial violence—the daily routine at the BNP HQ*

## INFLUENCES

Michael Woddis

**GEORGE MELLY**
Musician

**What books and authors have had the greatest influence on your political beliefs?**
*The Song of Maldoror* by Lautréamont—written in the 19th century, it foresaw the terrible swamp to come; *Bleak House*—Dickens at his most manic and inspired; *Paris Peasant* by Louis Aragon, before his conversion to Stalinism, transforms the obscurer corners of the French capital to a surreal paradise; *Mr Tod* by Beatrix Potter—it confronts nature without sentimentalising it, despite the coats and furnished earths and warrens.

**Name one film, one book, one play, one poem and one song or piece of music you would most like everyone to see, read or hear.**
**Film:** *L'Age d'or,* a film by Luis Buñuel in pessimistic defence of *L'Amour Fou.*
**Book:** André Breton's novel *Nadja,* which has a not dissimilar theme. If, tragically, madness is too high a price to pay for illumination, it is, even so, a close-run thing.
**Play:** *Ubu roi*, Alfred Jarry's turn of the century farce whose gross and obscene eponymous anti-hero offered a prophetic caricature of those dictators still dreaming at their school desks.
**Poem:** Lewis Carroll's "The Hunting of the Snark". Black humour illuminates this pursuit of the dream in all its absurd sublimity.
**Song:** "Young Woman's Blues", or indeed almost any blues by Bessie Smith, the Empress. Both naive and sophisticated, she projects the human spirit without compromise.

**In the early stages of your life, which figures stand out as an important influence on you?**
My mother in her maternal ambition; my father in his lack of ambition; a prep school headmaster, W W Twyne, whom I hated, and still hate, for everything he stood for.

**What event during your lifetime has had the greatest effect on your political beliefs?**
The holocaust, and the atom bomb—the Janus face of humanity's inhumanity.

**Which political figure, living or dead, do you most admire?**
John Wilkes.

**If you could visit any time in history for 24 hours, which would you choose?**
The day in 1924 on which André Breton launched surrealism.

**What do you consider the greatest threat at present to individual freedom and liberty?**
Centralised power armed with computer records.

**On important matters, whose opinion—other than your own—do you trust most?**
Now, no one. In the past (with reservations even so), George Orwell.

**Who is the greatest prime minister we never had?**
Denis Healey. He appears to be a human being.

**If you could pass one law, what would it be?**
The abolition of all laws.



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Associated Press

Relations between Russia and Ukraine, both nuclear powers, are becoming increasingly vexed. But there are still plenty of reasons for optimism, says **Mary Kaldor**

# Everybody needs good neighbours

During the August coup of 1991, the Ukrainian opposition parties and civic movements sent messages of support to the Russian democrats. They gathered in the Square of Independence, expressing solidarity with the Muscovites. When the coup was defeated, they shouted "Glory to Russia! Glory to Russian Democrats! Glory to Yeltsin! Yeltsin unity!" Now, two years later, there is dark talk of a growing conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Such a conflict, as one person said to me, "could make the Balkans look like child's play".

The basic cause of the conflict is the growth of nationalism, which, as yet, is confined to parts of the political élite. In Russia, Russian chauvinism has become the dominant ideology of the parliament in its struggle against Yeltsin. In Ukraine, nationalism is growing, both among the opposition and the government. Among those who were active in human-rights groups in the pre-1991 period, particularly in the Rukh independence movement, there is enormous frustration that, despite independence, so little has changed.

The former *nomenklatura* has remained in power, and most of the problems inherited from the past remain, including both economic and ecological problems. There is a tendency to argue that independence has not been achieved fully owing to the malign influence of Russia. At the same time, the ruling circles search for a new ideology to sustain their power positions—nationalism is the most readily available.

For the time being, nationalism is not ethnically based. Both the Russian and Ukrainian constitutions are based on citizenry. (It is worth recalling that this is also true of Serbia.) In Ukraine, efforts are made to cope positively with national minority problems. Out of a population of 54 million, some 12 million are Russians. Most of the Russians supported independence, and some of the most avid supporters of the Ukrainian national idea are Russian. Rather, nationalism is about culture and territory. It is born of the marriage between patriotism and the aspiration to statehood. The state has to become the institutional expression of patriotism. In cultural terms, the issue, at least for now, is not whether you are born speaking a particular language and belonging to a particular historical tradition, but whether you are willing to acquire it; it is about constructing a national culture through assimilation rather than through exclusion, which can also have dangerous implications.

The communist period in Ukraine was characterised by forced Russification. Some two-thirds of the population speak Russian and the majority of schools were Russian schools. Now that tendency is being reversed. From 1 September, all schools in Kiev will be Ukrainian. Ukrainian nationalists argue that the process of Ukrainianisation has been incomplete, and they point to the lack of Ukrainian schools in eastern Ukraine, which is largely populated by Russians. The language issue seems to generate enormous tension. There are endless arguments about statistics concerning the Russian-Ukrainian language balance of schools, classes, university faculties, newspapers, theatres and so on. In Crimea, where the former *nomenklatura* remain in power, I asked a group of officials what I thought was an innocuous question about the economic situation of the Tartars. To my amazement, my question caused an uproar. Then I discovered that my Ukranian friend sitting beside me had, not so innocently, translated my question into Ukrainian instead of Russian.

Linked to the cultural issue is the tendency to stereotype. "The Russians," says a typical Ukrainian nationalist, "have a certain mentality derived from the history of Tsarism and the subsequent communist period; they can't accept the independence of Ukraine." In contrast, he claims, the "mentality of Ukrainians is connected with an inferiority complex. Ukraine never had a statehood and this was a very painful process. Everything was taken from us. Gogol was Ukrainian, but he wrote in Russian." It is difficult to understand why this Russian mentality only applies to Russians in Russia or why the Ukrainians seem to ignore the existence of anti-nationalist Russians. I was in Kiev just after the Russian parliament had decided to claim Sevastopol. The Ukrainians complained that no one in Russia criticised the decision. Yet my Russian friends said that almost all civic groups and also many newspapers protested.

Love of one's country is not only love of culture, it is love of land. The borders of one's land are defined by history and, particularly in eastern Europe, those borders have been continuously contested. In the case of Ukraine, Russian chauvinistic claims centre around the issue of Crimea.

Crimea was always a multi-ethnic, multicultural region, inhabited by Tartars, Armenians, Greeks, Bulgarians, as well as Russians, who came there after the overthrow of the Tartar khanate in 1783. It was loved and written about by Russian intellectuals and writers, including Tolstoy, Chekhov and Pushkin. In the 19th century, Russian nationalists claimed that Crimea was the ancient heartland of Russian civilisation. Already, in 1917, Tartars were a minority. In 1944, the entire Tartar population of Crimea was deported, on the grounds that they had collaborated with the Nazis. Many Tartars had been executed when the Red Army recaptured Crimea from the Germans, and one-third of the Tartars perished during the deportation. They were sent to concentration camps and, later, to Central Asia. Other nationalities had been deported earlier as part of the Stalinist policy of deportation of national minorities. Crimea was resettled by Russian members of the *nomenklatura*; it became a resort area for party bosses, and the Black Sea fleet was based at Sevastopol. Primarily for economic reasons, Khrushchev gave Crimea to Ukraine as a present in 1954.

The current authorities in Crimea, who were elected in 1990, supported the August coup and, in the referendum on Ukrainian independence, the Crimea voted against independence, albeit by a small majority. The authorities in Crimea had proposed a referendum on Crimean independence in August 1992, but the referendum was cancelled after concessions from the Ukrainian government.

Since 1990, the Tartars have been returning to Crimea. A quarter of a million have already returned, and the influx continues. Their



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homes and their land are now occupied by Russians, so they settle on unused land, build their own houses and grow their own food. In some cases, they get official permission to settle on particular strips of land. The Ukrainian authorities claim that 16 million roubles have been made available to help Tartars and the Tartar language and to introduce Tartar newspapers and theatres. The Tartars I spoke to were bewildered and cynical about these claims. They are subject to continuous harassment by the authorities and live in extremely primitive conditions. In one settlement I visited, the houses had been pulled down four times and there was no money left to complete the houses and no prospects of jobs. Despite all this, the Tartars are totally committed to resettlement.

The current tragedy for the Tartars is that they could easily become the instrument of nationalist ambitions. Growing ethnic tension could inflame Russian demands for reunification with Russia and could provoke anti-Russian feeling in Ukraine. Last October, security officers attacked a small Tartar settlement called Alushta; the houses were destroyed, the inhabitants badly beaten, and several people were arrested. In response, Crimean Tartars stormed the building of the Crimean Supreme Council. As yet, relations between Tartars and the local population are not overtly hostile; one group of Tartars told me how they organised a round table with wine and food for Russians who lived in their old houses when they first returned. However, the Russian population has been fed with alarmist propaganda about how the Tartars are former Nazis and terrorists. An additional element is the claim of Tartar political leaders to self-determination. Although the Tartars say that what they want is self-determination within an autonomous Crimea within Ukraine, does the term self-determination mean they want their own state? One Tartar leader said privately that, if there were a war between Russia and Ukraine, Crimea would win its independence.

The other Crimean flashpoint is Sevastopol and the Black Sea fleet. Last year, Kravchuk and Yeltsin agreed to divide the fleet in half, but this seems extremely difficult to implement, not least because there is no Russian harbour capable of taking the big ships. The local authorities in Sevastopol have suggested leasing the base to Russia, which seems a possible compromise; it would mean Russia would not have to build expensive alternative facilities and Ukrainian sovereignty would be explicitly recognised. The Ukrainian authorities were sceptical about the proposal, but were prepared to discuss it; however, it was rejected by the Russians.

These controversies are exacerbated by the whole question of nuclear weapons that hangs over the Ukrainian-Russian relationship. Immediately after independence, Ukraine agreed to return all tactical nuclear weapons to Russia. Currently, Ukraine has 46 SS-24 missiles, 130 SS-19 missiles and 41 nuclear bombers with around 600 warheads. Under the START 1 agreement, Ukraine has to get rid of the SS-19 missiles. According to the Lisbon Protocol, by which Ukraine participated in the START process, Ukraine also promised to sign the non-proliferation treaty and to get rid of the remaining missiles and bombers. However, there are now second thoughts both among the opposition and the government. In particular, the nationalist Republican Party now favours retention of the weapons. A proposal under consideration by the Ukrainian Supreme Council recommends that Ukraine signs the START treaty as a nuclear state, but expresses its intention to become, eventually, a non-nuclear state.

The case for retaining nuclear weapons is twofold. First, it regards Russia as the successor state of the Soviet Union and, as such, receives disproportionate western attention and assistance. By keeping nuclear weapons, Ukraine shares Russia's great-power status, and also can bargain for additional western aid. Second, it is argued that nuclear weapons are a factor of stability, deterring, for example, attacks on atomic plants.

The problem is that even though these are long-range weapons, designed to hit the United States, not Russia, and even though Ukraine does not yet have physical control over the weapons, the very decision to keep them, even if only temporarily, presupposes an underlying conflict with Russia, and sets in motion the action-reaction process of growing mutual suspicion. The idea that nuclear weapons are an effective deterrent to conflict presupposes the conflict is already under control—this was the case in postwar Europe. It is terrifying to speculate on the role of nuclear weapons in the kind of free-for-all military situation that characterises the former Yugoslavia or the Transcaucasus.

All the same, the situation is not comparable to that in the former Yugoslavia nor the Transcaucasus region. What is lacking in comparison with these other regions is the social basis of nationalism. Opinion polls indicate that the majority of Ukrainians favour close ties with Russia, and that the majority of the Russian population oppose extreme solutions. In particular, two ingredients are lacking that have been critical elsewhere. One is the widespread existence of paramilitary groups who spread fear among the population, and the other is the idleness, insecurity and frustration associated with large-scale unemployment. There are, of course, paramilitary groups—it is easy enough to get hold of surplus weapons and even surplus soldiers—and there are also the "dark forces" that nobody really knows about. These are the remnants of the old Soviet state apparatus, especially the security services; unaccountable, secret institutions that behave as if the old Soviet Union still exists. But, as yet, paramilitary groups play a marginal role.

**It is terrifying to think about the role of nuclear weapons in a situation like that in former Yugoslavia**

The other ingredient in the spread of militant nationalism is unemployment—paramilitaries feed on it. Because Ukraine has been backward in introducing market reforms, unemployment is still rather low. There has been a big drop in output, owing to the fall in military spending and arms exports and in inter-republican trade. But because there has been no privatisation, enterprises have been hoarding, and their debts have risen alarmingly, resulting in a rapid growth of inflation that will have to be curbed.

Moreover, the recent rouble reform may well come to be interpreted as an attack by the Russian parliament on the other republics—the Soviet economy was so centralised that every enterprise depends on Russia, both for inputs and for markets. In Ukraine, which is already afflicted by the breakdown of the old payments system, as well as the restrictions on fuel supplies from Russia, the effects could be devastating. The disintegration of an economy in this part of the world results in the disintegration of the state and the collapse of authority. It is the recipe for the emergence of local warlords, nationalist interventions and violent chaos of a systematic kind.

Can this depressing scenario be avoided? Are there lessons to be drawn from nationalist conflicts elsewhere that could be applied to the situation in the former Soviet Union, and especially in the Ukraine and Crimea? One lesson is economic. Instead of focusing only on market reforms, even though these are needed, western countries need also to open their markets to trade, to help create facilities for reconstructing inter-republican trade, and to engage in all kinds of projects for economic and ecological reconstruction, especially nuclear clean-up, so as to sustain the level of economic activity.

A second lesson is political. In Yugoslavia, western governments completely ignored the role of anti-nationalist opposition groups. It is very important to encourage alternatives to nationalist political groupings, to listen to their ideas and advice, and to increase their visibility. Especially important in this respect is support for the independent media, particularly television, which can counter nationalist propaganda, enemy images and stereotyping.

A third lesson is military. It may sound utopian, but the simplest solution to the problem of nuclear weapons and the Black Sea fleet is nuclear disarmament and the demilitarisation of the Black Sea. Our own preoccupation with great power status, as expressed in navies and nuclear weapons, makes any pressure on Ukraine or Russia seem hypocritical. What is more, disarmament has to mean the destruction of weapons and the redeployment of people, if weapons and soldiers are not to reappear in a more dangerous guise under the control of newly formed paramilitary groups.

Above all, the lesson to be learned is that the ability of outsiders to do anything depends on the ability to sustain the legitimacy and credibility of international institutions. If we are unable to do anything in the former Yugoslavia, what can we be expected to do in a much larger, more complex and more dangerous situation?

*Mary Kaldor visited Ukraine and Crimea as part of a Helsinki Citizens' Assembly delegation to discuss what could be done to help the Crimean Tartars and prevent a conflict between Russia and Ukraine*



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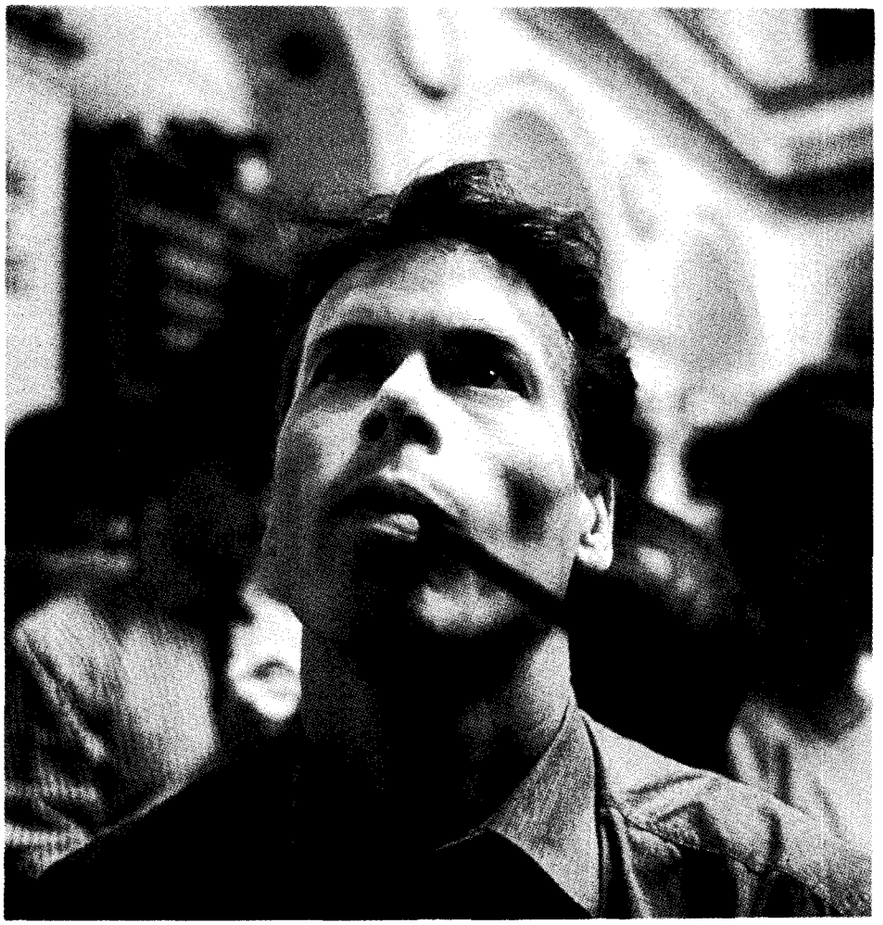

The death of the ERM is no reason for Britain to be smug. The community will need something to replace it or there will be anarchy, argues **Victor Keegan**

# About face

The breakup of Europe's exchange rate mechanism was, like Mark Twain's view of marriage, a good solution to a problem that should never have arisen in the first place.

Managed currencies, make no mistake, are a Good Thing. The delight shared incongruously by people on the right and the left at the demise of the ERM was misplaced. What divine right have currencies to be left to market forces, when practically every other area of trade is in some way regulated?

It happens to suit Britain at the moment to be outside the ERM for purely opportunistic reasons. What ought to have been an expansionist European club has been hijacked by Germany and turned into a deflationary machine driven by Germany's (misplaced) need for high interest rates to curb its credit-driven absorption of the Eastern Lander. It is absurd that what ought to be a European institution reflecting pan-European priorities can be governed by the domestic requirements of one of its members.

If that is to be the case, then the advance of Europe will only be as strong as its weakest link. In these circumstances, Britain is absolutely right to decouple the pound, especially as our main European rivals, curiously, don't seem to mind us having a competitive currency while they are still stuck in an economic quagmire. In the first days after the ERM's breakup, France still appeared wedded to high interest rates to sustain its *franc fort* policy, rather than doing the sensible thing of dropping interest rates to encourage growth.

Delight at seeing the UK economy entering a period of export-led growth was only mildy tempered by the Prime Minister's brazen attempt to turn Britain's ejection from the ERM last September (which John Major spent up to £5 billion of the taxpayers' money in a single day trying to *avoid*) into a far-sighted victory. But the temporary advantages of being outside the ERM should not blind us to the dangers ahead when the sea turns rough.

The turnover of the foreign exchange markets has ballooned to almost a trillion dollars every day. This is at least 20 to 30 times higher than the amount of trade actually transacted, if anyone is bothered by such things these days. It includes speculation, hedging, insurance, drug and mafia money, as well as legitimate transactions. The fact that a considerable amount of the hedging is done by pension funds trying to protect our savings from currency depreciation is only a partial justification. No one country has any chance once the word gets around the speculators that a particular currency is "on offer". This is why, during the 1980s, the pound, quite ludicrously was driven down from nearly two dollars to almost one dollar, then back up again.

This reduced the entire nation's purchasing power (when it went down), and caused hundreds of thousands of unnecessary redundancies when it went over the top (as during 1980/81). It is only by grouping together on a world (and not just European) basis that nation-states can hope to combat the beast unleashed by the abolition of exchange controls during the late seventies and eighties. The late Lord Kaldor once remarked that the abolition of exchange controls would make it very difficult, if not impossible for a radical Labour government ever to be elected again. This was because of the capital flight that would take place if radical policies were ever adopted by a potential Labour administration. It was the shrewdest move the Conservatives made in a decade and, surprise surprise, it wasn't even mentioned in the 1979 manifesto.

It is much easier to let a genie out of a bottle than to put it back again. The reintroduction of exchange controls is not a very practicable option, because the very mention of it by a party with a chance of getting elected would cause a mass exodus of funds and lead to such a sharp collapse of the currency that electoral defeat would become self-fulfilling.

What else can be done? The idea of a tax on all cross-border currency transactions (as suggested by Professor James Tobin, the Nobel laureate, and recently revisited in a Fabian pamphlet by Ruth Kelly) is enormously attractive.

In theory, that is. In theory, it would either quell speculation or, at the very least, generate huge tax revenues from a major conduit of the economy not famous for paying taxes. The trouble is that it has to be levied in every country in the world, or else the tidal wave of money-flows will be routed through the one country not participating. The scheme is as strong as the weakest tax-haven. By all means try to impose it universally through the IMF, on the grounds of "nothing ventured, nothing gained"—but prepare for disappointment.

It still remains true that fixing the value of the currency is the first priority of an intelligent industrial strategy. It is one of the few areas where governments can have a big influence on events. It can either be a force for evil (as during 1980/81) when the economy was nearly suffocated by an overvalued pound deliberately induced by the government) or a force for good as during the period since Black September when we were mercifully, if cynically, released from an overvalued exchange rate.

Exchange rates are an unusual example of a subject on which industry doesn't always know what is best for itself. A company can think it is doing well if it is increasing its exports by 3 per cent in a recession. Indeed, it would be doing well. But if imports are shooting ahead by 6 per cent, good isn't good



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enough to prevent the trade deficit from getting even worse. Overvalued exchange rates are pernicious because they generate unnecessary unemployment and hit the very poor much harder than the rich.

A fixed exchange rate system is, at the very least, a practical and available option to curb the anarchy of the foreign exchange markets, which have slipped out of sovereign control. There is a strong case for rejoining the ERM, when—dare I say it—the time is ripe, and then trying to turn it into a worldwide system of the kind that worked so successfully in the 30 years after the postwar Bretton Wood agreement.

It must avoid the political pretensions of the ERM and be flexible enough to allow currencies to change (ahead of market expectations) when economic fundamentals change. Its membership conditions would, hopefully, avoid the circumstances of Britain's entry when we joined at a rate for the pound that nearly all of our partners knew to be overvalued. Only a worldwide club can have the massed resources to take on the speculators and win.

It is important to separate the currency stability function of the ERM from its political function (a staging post to a single European currency). Re-entry for currency stability reasons wouldn't exclude the possibility of the pound eventually contemplating marriage proposals from other EC currencies. But that should not even be thought about until economic fundamentals like inflation, growth and unemployment have converged not just for ten minutes, but for a period of years.

We must never again make the mistake of entering a fixed currency system at an overvalued rate in order to change our economic behaviour. We must wait until our economic behaviour has changed before contemplating monetary matrimony. If we haven't learned that lesson by now, we never will.

*Victor Keegan is economics editor at the "Guardian"*

**Sign of the times: a dealer at La Bourse as the france plummeted against the Deutschmark**

It had to happen eventually. For two decades, **Max Farrar** has been active in community politics in inner-city Leeds. Here he reflects on . . .

# My mugging

It was just a matter of time before it happened to me, and I was, I thought, prepared. I had folded two £10 notes into an obscure pocket of my jeans, but I now realised it was a mistake not to have a couple of pound coins loose in a normal pocket. At first, I thought the youngsters coming towards me were too young, too short, to do anything, but as they drew closer, I knew this was the moment I'd been waiting for.

For 23 years, I've been walking along Chapeltown Road from my house, to the shops, to community meetings, to weddings and christenings. Sometimes, I just go out for the pleasure of being among the trees and the bustle and goodwill of this beautiful city where I will always bump into a friend. Friday night was just turning into Saturday morning when I left my friends' house. "Get a taxi," they said. Almost all our white friends have been attacked recently, and so have an unprecedented number of black people. "This is where I live," I said. "I'll walk."

It had to happen, and I had planned to fight, so when the first youngster, no taller than 5'6", and looking no older than my 14-year-old son, pushed into me and said, "Give me 50p", I told him to "fuck off", and kept on walking. But they know this enterprise well, and immediately formed a ring. I'm not sure who hit who first, but I targeted the smallest boy and landed a punch before I was felled.

I got up and threatened murder, hit out again, and then saw one of the two larger youths, perhaps 5'10", at least a couple of inches bigger than me, come at me from the right-hand side. He kicked me hard in the ribs; I was bounced on to the pavement and kicked from all sides. It was over in half a minute. I still had my money and my watch, but my glasses were smashed.

My head and face are slightly cut, my lip is sticking out a bit, and I have bruises in all kinds of unlikely places, but the police say that people who fight in these situations tend to get stabbed. I knew this, so why did I fight? In my teens, I substituted verbal aggression for the physical version, and gave up rugby, which I played with a vigour I now realise was close to ferocity, when I went to university and saw that there was no possibility of merging the sporting life with the libertarian, pro-feminist political life I was drawn to.

Nearly 48 hours after the attack, I feel depressed, and I know that depression is not far from anger. I fought these boys out of anger and, now that I have discovered the identity of one of them, I am wondering whether I have the kind of anger that is looking for retribution. There is an outrage growing in our neighbourhood, and there are people I know who would happily damage this boy and his friends.

Earlier that evening, I had been talking with someone who might help to raise money for the youth centre on whose management committee I serve. This money would go towards running an "alternative schooling" project designed to pick up these very youths who are rampaging through our streets. But the task of fund-raising is becoming more difficult all the time: the outrage in the community is extending to those who, historically, have defended the "rebel youth", those whom racism has rejected, and there are many who are baying that compassion won't work, breaking legs will.

After I picked myself off the ground and my head had begun to clear, I went across the road to a nearby club. I was surrounded by people, young and old, some of whom I knew, who'd seen the assault, gave me one youth's first name, and told me to call the police. One of my friends suggested we go out and find them. But I didn't feel angry or vengeful. Today, my dull, dispirited anger is about my own impotence, and my rage against a system that is producing these children.

It's not the ghetto that's creating them; nor is it, in a simplistic way, the capitalist system. Chapeltown is a fine place where the vast majority of people live by a moral code far higher than you'll find in the Conservative cabinet. If the fault were capitalism or the ghetto, we would all be sinking in the same mire. But there are social forces at work that derive, ultimately, from the regime that has been imposed on us for the past 14 years. And I am impotent. These children, these amoral, dangerous, brutal children, are the products of a type of society for which I have actively been trying to establish an alternative for more than half my life. I have failed and I lash out. I contemplate further, unlawful, action because I begin to wonder if community-organised punishment might work; then I remember that knee-capping car thieves in Belfast has had no effect.

And I know that I lash out because those children represent to me an oppressive, irrational power, and I remember all those men in uniform when I was a child and those teachers and prefects who hit me, and the rage with which I tried to resist, and I see that I am with those children, but I had one option that they never had, and never will have, which is to make my way in the literate, white world.

Two hours later, I walked down those same streets. I carried an empty Lucozade bottle, and worried that it wasn't quite long enough to inflict a serious wound. When I got home, I put the unbroken bottle into the recycling box for white glass. Tonight I'll talk some more about funding a National Curriculum Free School.



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Kalgoorlie, in Western Australia, has been a mining boom town for 100 years. **Pete May** reports from the town's "golden mile", where lonely miners seek relief

# Rooting for the dirty diggers

In Kalgoorlie's brothels, the miners arrive in their work clothes; singlets encrusted with red dirt, green shorts and steel toe-capped boots. It is the first thing an English eye notices; that sex is so casual you don't even change into clean clothes. That and the fact that the town's three brothels are made of dinkum, true-blue Aussie corrugated iron, and look more like stables than parlours of pleasure; indeed, with typical laconic wit, the locals refer to the brothels' numbered doors as "the starting gates". The miners, by far the most frequent users, arrive in battered "Utes", that is, four-wheel-drive utility vehicles or pick-up trucks. The "girls" insist they take their muddy boots off and leave them on the veranda: the Jacuzzi and spas are more a matter of hygiene than hedonism.

Kalgoorlie is an eight-hour journey on the "Prospector" train from Perth; an interminable haul through vast tracts of nothing, past sand that changes from red to orange and back again, shrubs and the odd gum tree. On my journey to "Kal" (as it is called by the locals), I was sitting next to a middle-aged man named Bob, who claimed to be a Vietnam war veteran and to have worked as a miner and earth remover. He soon gave up on his Sidney Sheldon novel and, during the journey, drank 15 cans of Emu beer. He asked me if I had seen the "knockers", by which he meant the brothels, recommending number 181 as being good for a drink and yarn with the girls. Bob was the kind of Aussie bloke who would think that an unreconstructed man was someone working on a building site. "Some people say that if it had a fanny you could marry a washing machine, but give women their due, I could never bring up kids . . ."

Kal was founded in 1893 after prospector Paddy Hannan discovered gold there—the spot is still marked. In the goldrush days of the 1890s, the population was increasing by 15,000 a year and reached 90,000 at its peak; today it has stabilised at 27,000; when the gold has gone, it will join the other ghost towns. In the early days, water was more precious than gold. Since 1903 the water supply has been pumped uphill along a 350-mile pipeline from Perth; a scheme so derided that its engineer, Charles O'Connor, committed suicide a year before the four-year project was completed.

It is a town of wide streets, old hotels, newsagents selling huge mounds of razzle mags on the bottom shelves and "skimpy" bars where the barmaids serve in their underwear. The town's main street, Hannan Street, ends abruptly in a huge hole—the open-cast mine that has found new reserves of gold and nickel in Kalgoorlie's "golden mile". On the day I arrive, the papers say that a 25-year-old miner was killed in a rock fall.

Pete May

The brothels, now centred on Hay Street, are as old as Kalgoorlie itself. They are technically illegal, but allowed to operate by the police as part of a containment policy. Once there were 50 of them. The tourist board sells Hay Street singlets and postcards. According to the local paper, the *Kalgoorlie Miner*, the madam of 181 Hay Street, Sally Kenworthy, is planning to start a brothel museum, with the full support of the local MP and tourist board. Only the town's mayor has registered any objection, saying he is "sickened and nauseated by the idea".

I decide to seek out Ms Kenworthy. "Welcome to 181, girls, girls, girls . . spa . . . sauna . . . open 12 noon," reads the sign outside her brothel. Hay Street is disturbingly suburban. I find myself walking around the block three times and then loitering on the other side of the road like a hopeless voyeur, before finally ringing the bell. The eyes of every car driver seem to burn into my back. A bouncy young woman who would fit neatly into any episode of *Home and Away* tells me that Kenworthy is in bed. Half an hour later, I return to discover that she's taking one of her workers' babies to hospital for some jabs. Finally, by which time the curtain-twitchers must be convinced I have both a prodigious sexual appetite and a bursting wallet, I am asked inside.

Sally Kenworthy proves to be a business-like New Zealander in her early thirties, friendly, but with the hint of a hard edge to her. We sit in wicker chairs in the brothel's cosy communal area, next to an outside spa, as the girls walk in and out. The phone rings and a 19-year-old mother accepts a date with a punter; "You're mad," Kenworthy tells her with parental concern. Above the till, the kind of humorous sticker you'd see in any office reads: "I haven't had sex for so long I've forgotten who gets tied up."

Kenworthy bought 181 Hay Street from her sister. Previously a restaurant manager, she sees the brothel as simply an extension of her career in the hospitality industry. As for the punters? "Dollar signs on legs," she remarks glibly.

She takes proprietorial pride in the smoothness of her operation. The brothel is run entirely by women, although brothel isn't the right word she tells me. "It has too many slovenly implications, we're known as a 'house' or 'knock up' locally." None of the girls is on drugs, she insists. All are checked for sexual diseases and have their medical cards inspected by the vice squad. An average of 30 men a night use the brothel and all have to wear condoms for full and oral sex—"no party hat, no party".

The museum idea started off as a joke, she admits, but she soon came to realise its commercial potential. It will contain mock-ups of old-style rooms, old costumes, photos and a dungeon. The richest material will come from the older residents' memories. "We had one old bloke come in here with photos of the queues. As a 15-year-old, he used to queue up and then sell his spot."

Kenworthy introduces me to Dee, a tall, thin, peroxide-blonde American in her late thirties, who describes Kenworthy as "the best boss in the world". She is upfront about what she does and positively eager to talk. She has been married three times and once wrote for an American rock magazine. She became a prostitute in 1989 after she smashed up her boyfriend's Jaguar and had to find $1,700 in two weeks.

"This isn't a typical brothel. In Perth, you're more like a steak in a butcher's shop, you



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don't get to talk to the clients first. Here, it's more of a nightclub atmosphere, you can say no to anyone you want, but if you get picked up you get paid for it.

"I work my own hours and there's no one pinching your bum for bugger-all money. There's total equality. I've worked with Aboriginal girls, Thais, girls studying to be lawyers, the sister of a famous actress . . . My son's in Perth, he's eight, and when he's older I'll tell him what I do. It's an honourable profession."

Hay Street is certainly popular with tourists. "We must be in more family photo albums than Disneyland," says Dee. "We're always showing coach parties round. Last week, we had the USA Rotary Club and their wives—we got an award from them."

Despite Kenworthy's dollar signs on legs assertion, Dee says that: "Some are enjoyable dollars. Ninety-five per cent you're not attracted to, but 5 per cent you want to keep in all night. We had some good-looking guys in a band here one night and did them all for $200 as that was all they had, and there were these twins that all the girls wanted to do for free . . ."

Although there are two judges among the regulars (who tend to like discipline and being dressed as little boys) most customers are 18 to 35-year-old miners into straight sex. Dee says that at least 25 per cent of the customers don't even want sex. Many of the miners are stuck out in the bush for months on end and just like to have a woman to talk to.

Some like to suck her toes, one brings his own lingerie and another miner arrives in a red leather miniskirt and insists on being treated as a woman. "Some will even buy your pantyhose off you. I always keep an extra large garter belt with me in case the guys want to buy one."

Dee shows me around the rooms. "This is where I do domination," she explains, as casually as if it were merely some new form of board game. We view the "Tiger" room and the "red-and-black room". A pink vibrator is on the bedside cabinet. "Here's my working equipment. The house buys all condoms, lubricants and massage lotions. We don't use the duvets, I put my work towel on the bed," she says, pointing to a large white bath towel. If anything sums up the essentially non-erotic nature of paid-for sex, it is my mental images of this "work towel", awash with sexual secretions.

Dee suggests that I return that evening to view the "mugs" (their name for their customers). Returning at 10pm, Dee is in her working outfit of black tights, mini-skirt and top. Several younger women, some voluptuous, some not, sit in the doorways, grooving to U2 and Lynrd Skynrd. Abby, an older woman, is on reception.

Abby is a Pom. Originally from the East End, she was once married to a former Chelsea footballer. After the break-up of her marriage she emigrated to Australia, taking a job as a housekeeper in Perth, which turned out to be working for a madam in a brothel. "I was 33, but some of the blokes started asking for me. I'd been sleeping around for closeness, but it didn't mean a thing. So I thought, why not get paid for it?" She then became a madam herself, but tired of playing "Mother Superior" to the girls, who weren't allowed out after 6pm by the police. Now she is a part-time receptionist at 181 Hay Street and educates her three children at private school.

Discipline, if that's the correct word, is no problem, says Abby. "People think twice about questioning me. They know it's the only place they can get a root (an Aussie euphemism for sex). We'll even get help from the clients themselves: they beat up a couple of blokes who were violent with the girls." Those too drunk to leave are carried outside, sometimes naked. For worse offenders, there are harsher deterrents. "At one place I worked, we had to wash the men's dicks in a bowl and check 'em. One guy was so out of order, we pinned him up against the door and I threw the slop bowl over him."

**Women of the outback: many miners are stuck out in the bush for months on end and just want someone to talk to**

Dee, Abby and I sit around a plastic table on the veranda, sipping tinnies of VB and eating corn chips. Crickets chirp outside and a stricken mosquito veers drunkenly across the table. Behind us is the house price list: $100 for 30 minutes, $125 for 45 minutes, $150 for one hour, $280 for two hours, spa and sauna $25, bi-girls for 45 minutes $300. Sometimes miners who have been out in the bush for months book the place for a whole night.

A miner is led from one of the rooms beaming. A teenage boy rides up on a pushbike and banters with the girls. "He'll be coming here when he's 18," says Dee. "We've just had three virgins in here tonight, they used to come past as little boys." "Like Paul the cab driver," suggests Abby.

Abby tells me that she is a qualified nurse. Her skills are necessary. She has to clean men up after brawls, and once a kid on a motorbike was showing off to the girls and drove into a lampost, taking half his face off.

"One bloke had a coronary on me. Just as we were finishing doing it, he started having acute chest pains. I resuscitated him and then had to find a discreet taxi driver to take him out of the side gates to the hospital, as he was rather high-up in the community."

"What are you doing, Darling? Come and talk to me," calls out Dee as if she is a vendor in one of Perth's food malls. A miner in green work shorts and shirt comes over to talk to her, an awkward boyish grin on his face. The punters seem lonely more than anything. They chat and he moves on to the next brothel as Dee calls out, "See you later Honey!"

"He's been coming here for two and a half years. Guys like that tend to stick to one lady," Dee explains.

"The miners here go for warm, homely types," adds Abby. "They wouldn't feel comfortable with a stunner. The girls have to be able to talk to them, to be surrogate girlfriends. They even have to help some of them buy Christmas presents for their mothers."

A tattooed driller called Jimbo arrives, also in his dusty work clothes, his Ute parked outside. Dee hugs him. Jimbo is an old friend and has stayed with her and her boyfriend in Perth, she tells me.

"I've been out bush for six weeks," Jimbo drunkenly explains, "If I want a root I'll go elsewhere."

"I'll sleep with his mates, but not with one of my friends," adds Dee.

They go off to crack some tinnies. The kid on the pushbike returns, cycling up to the girls. A middle-aged miner with a Mervyn Hughes moustache arrives, beer-gut flopping over his shorts, and is shown through, grinning drunkenly. Another drunk arrives, asks to see the madam and then leaves. "What's he on? You get to know the look in their eyes," says Abby.

The time has come to depart. On an ill-lit Hay Street, the Utes are still parked outside the knock-ups, and on the verandas stand piles of work boots. Perhaps they should be the new brothel museum's prime exhibit.



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What are Britain's nuclear weapons for and where do we point them? **Ben Webb** reports on last month's defence white paper

# No clear deterrent

It used to be simple, or at least to have its own strained logic. In 1980, Francis Pym, the then defence secretary, spelt it out: Britain's "independent nuclear deterrent" was a "second centre of decision". If the Americans lost their resolve in a confrontation with the Soviets over Europe, the British could threaten to push the button themselves. No, this was not blackmail: we were helping to keep the Atlantic Alliance "credible" by creating a little extra uncertainty for the men in the Kremlin. Such was Britain's "unique contribution" to western security—a madwoman corollary to what Richard Nixon called the "madman principle".

This then is what the Polaris submarine force and its successor, Trident, were for. (A "sub-strategic" nuclear weapon, the WE-177 bomb, rounded out the "deterrent", having the added merit of keeping the RAF happy.) Where we pointed the things was self-evident.

Today, neither the purpose nor the adversary is clear. Yet anyone who paid £9 for this month's defence white paper will have felt let down. The rubric "Britain's nuclear forces" receives precisely 36 lines and a colour photo of a Trident submarine. How many warheads will be carried on the Trident boats' D-5 missiles once they are fitted, you ask? That "will be decided nearer the time." What will replace the WE-177 nuclear bomb? "An announcement will be made in due course."

The reported excision of three pages from the nuclear section of the white paper just before publication cannot have helped, but many had expected the MoD to be faster on its feet. It was generally surmised that the £3 billion "stand-off" nuclear missile would be shelved; instead, the proverbially "ageing" WE-177 is now expected to serve "well into the next century". It was also thought that the future use of Trident would be addressed—18 months earlier, a defence select committee report had noted that the "justification for Trident . . . [is] once again [a] legitimate political and military issue." You would hardly know it from the white paper.

Rather like the Church of England, Britain's nuclear doctrine has melted into air, but the assets remain and the priests still have to be kept busy. Colonel Andrew Duncan of the International Institute for Strategic Studies remarked: "They [the government and the military] don't really know what they want to be threatening. But they do want the ability to deter either a strong nuclear power or a minor, rogue state."

Labour MP Bruce George, the longest-serving member of the defence select committee, added: "The government is trying to find ways of justifying it [Trident], as there's not much to be gained by scrapping it."

The expedient now favoured seems to be to turn Trident into an all-purpose nuclear "platform". Multiple-warhead missiles would be kept as the "strategic" system, with single warheads fitted to D-5 missiles as a new "sub-strategic" weapon. Missiles and warheads could then be mixed and matched at the quayside to deter a range of big adversaries and smaller fry. The software would present no great problem—as Bruce George put it, "It is painfully easy to change a target."

"I suppose the argument is that you can use an existing platform more cheaply," says George."It is unlikely that Trident will be decommissioned or bargained away [though the latter is Labour Party policy], so why not use it for more than one purpose?"

George is "not unaware" that the bangs-for-bucks equation works the other way as well—"a £10 billion system might be seen as a pretty extravagant way of carrying single warheads". He worries that having a highly mobile sub-strategic weapon "at the moment would not be good for our international relations"—it "could even be a self-fulfilling prophecy" if it raised the nuclear stakes

worldwide. Even now, we still live in uncertain times: "It would be patently absurd to confine targeting to one specific part of the globe. I can't forecast what the strategic environment will be 30 years down the road."

Furthermore, fitting single warheads to Trident missiles might not be such a bad thing: "It would be more in keeping with arms control. There are good arms-control reasons why single warheads might be preferable."

George is looking on the bright side. What he sees as a roundabout way of keeping warhead numbers down is regarded by others as an entrée to an new role. Rear Admiral Richard Irwin, the chief strategic systems executive, gave the tactical Trident idea a fair wind in testimony to the defence select committee in March. Yes, he said, a D-5 missile could do pretty well anything a "stand-off" missile was capable of. Irwin also implied that such a sub-strategic deterrent would not be pointed at the old, eastern bloc adversaries: "It does not go the whole way around the world, but there is little constraint on range." It could patrol the world from the eastern Atlantic, or closer to the target if desired.

This notion, hinted at to the committee but not so far put to the public, parallels the idea of a "nuclear expeditionary force" floated in the US Strategic Air Command's strategic deterrence study three years ago. That report clearly located the future threat: "The growing wealth of petro-nations and newly hegemonic powers is available to bullies and crazies, if they gain control, to wreak havoc on world tranquility." Somewhat more poetically, CIA director James Wolsey said earlier this year: "We have slain the dragon but now live in a jungle full of poisonous snakes."

Paul Rogers of Bradford University's department of peace studies sees a trend: "The military complex is searching for a new role, and protecting the interests of the wealthier north against any kind of threat from the south is eminently saleable."

Saleable to the British public it might be, but other states, not least the single superpower, might not be best pleased with a British role east not of Aden, but of everywhere. Thus perhaps the relative quiet in this country about third-world bullies, snakes and crazies.

Government and military circles are leaning on three much more modest arguments for maintaining Britain's nuclear deterrent— beyond, that is, the truism that: "We don't know what will happen in 30 years' time." These arguments are a) that Trident is a "minimum deterrent", cheap and relatively harmless—to nuclear weapons what Nancy Reagan's "itsy-bitsy" Beretta was to handguns; b) that it is, again, cheap, having come in under cost; and c) that it is there already, so in a sense free.

On a) it is worth reporting a Pentagon view, always bearing in mind that in these matters arguments often follow weapons, rather than vice versa, and that the US Defense Department wants to hang on to its weapons. Nevertheless: in Britain the so-called minimum deterrent is presented as a good, thrifty thing—almost moral. "Minimum" appeals to the parsimonious streak in the British. Yet at the Pentagon, minimum deterrence is politically incorrect. Why? "Targeting only civilians or cities per se, which is inherent in the minimum deterrent concept is immoral." Worse than immoral: "It allows for virtually no options, and is the least credible of all nuclear postures." So there.

On the second point, the government's gleeful reports that Trident has come in below estimates ignores the charge that its US-made missiles have been effectively discounted by more than £1.2 billion. The MoD's figure of £6 billion for running and decommissioning costs over 30 years is also debatable.

Finally, on the third argument, weapons systems do not just fade away; they are updated and replaced, in the familiar process of continuous innovation and planned obsolesence. Polaris was updated with the Chevaline warhead, and is now being replaced by Trident, at a stated cost of £10 billion.

Any bets on how soon the defence select committee will be asked to report on a "follow-on to Trident"?

Min Cooper



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If family photographs are always a bit of a let down, get a camcorder, advises the unsmiling **Laurie Taylor**

# Camera obscura

Even though there was some argument about who should sit where, we all agreed that a group family photograph was a good idea. It would, we said several times as the furniture moved around, be something to show to our children's children. So, as soon as I'd checked that Claire knew how the automatic focus worked, I began to line up the cast. If Dad stayed where he was in the armchair, then I could squat on one of the arms, and my son Matthew could sit next to me on "the cat's chair" and point two-month-old Joseph towards the lens. As Claire retreated towards the living-room window, I reminded everyone once again of the significance of this photographic moment. "Four generations," I announced. "Eighty-five years' difference between the youngest and the oldest. Great-grandfather, grandfather, father, son. Stanley, Laurence, Matthew and Joseph. The Taylor family. Everybody ready?"

But, even before Claire had pressed the button, I'd begun to suspect that this attempt to produce an ancestral study for the pages of the family album might be doomed. Now that I have the print in front of me, I can see that it contains not the merest hint of occasion, not a glimmer of significance. There are three unsmiling men sitting in a straight line. The one on the extreme right is in an armchair, the one on the extreme left has a tiny baby on his knee, the one in the middle looks rather less animated than the chair arm on which he squats.

At first glance, the print was further evidence that not a single member of my family is remotely photogenic. In all the pictures of births, weddings, anniversaries and holidays, that fill my mother's scrapbook, the immediate relations are always instantly recognisable. Whether on the threshold of a new life, celebrating 20 years together, or leaning on the seafront rail at Paignton, they all look as though they have been ushered into the photographic frame straight from a decade of solitary confinement.

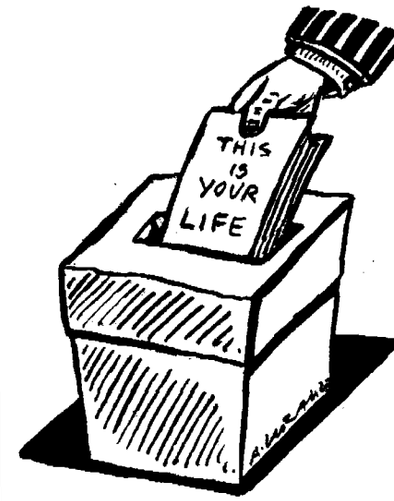
Much the same can be said about my own photograph collection, which now fills three large box files. No matter how long and hard I stare at the expressions I have assumed in most of the prints, I am wholly unable even to guess at the emotions they represent. I can remember that some of them were taken when I was with Jane, others when I lived with Maureen. But my face records nothing about the state of the relationship when the shutter clicked. Is this blank face here testament to the blissful beginning of an affair, or evidence of its traumatic final days? I appear to be equally happy and unhappy with everyone. Neither is my cultural past any more secure. Did I genuinely like Venice in 1973? Or Rio in 1982? Or even Paris in 1991? Nothing about the way I drink my cappuccino at Florians or stand on the beach in Ipanema or stare in the general direction of the Louvre pyramid suggests I have the faintest consciousness of my surroundings, let alone any attitude towards them.

It was only when I took another careful look at the failed ancestral photograph last week that I realised with a shock that the family problem was rather more complex than a failure to be photogenic. For although three generations of Taylors stared expressionlessly back at me, if I held the picture just so, with the light shining from the side, it was suddenly plain that there, upon the face of the fourth generation, was something that at least resembled an emotion. It might have been mere coincidence, some random working of the facial muscles, an external reflection of hunger pangs, but there was no doubt about it. Baby Joseph was smiling.

Since then, I've gone back through the family albums. And the evidence is overwhelming. It isn't that the past and present generations of my family, who peer blankly back at me from promenades and piers and picnic sites, lack emotions: they only differ from others around them in the album by their simple inability to hold a smile for long enough for it to be registered by the camera. That dreadful nonplussed look they wear isn't indifference to loved ones or surroundings, it's a perfect representation of that awful moment when one suddenly realises that a smile specially struck for the camera can no longer be sustained, and that there is nothing to be done but to allow it to slide inexorably down one's face like a lost sliver of spaghetti.

People without long-lived smiles (I suspect an hereditary factor) are victims of the still camera. It's only smiles that count in photographs. Without words to give the context, all other expressions remain uncertain or ambiguous. We may like to feel that we are able to convey a complex range of emotions about our holiday in Venice, our life with Margery, or arriving at our 50th birthday, but without some outside help nobody can read them from our mere photographic expressions.

Last Saturday, my son Matthew came round, turned on the television, and I realised quite what I'd been missing. There on the screen was not only someone who looked physically like my father, but who also perfectly captured the way he glanced wearily at my brother for not clearing up the coffee cups, the manner in which he smiled affectionately at the cat as it scampered from his path, and the precise ironic detail of his face as he settled down to read the headlines in the local press. In a few seconds, the pictures on the screen captured so much of his emotional repertoire, his way of being in the world. But then, as Matthew said, casually volting over a prejudice that culturally divides one half of the population from the other as cleanly as a ten-foot wall: "I knew you'd like the camcorder. Once you'd seen it work."




# Jesus H Christchurch

*This Is Your Life is to return to the BBC in the New Year*

That Was Your Life, Mr Major,
One of the nine that one owns:
The vultures will hover, I'll wager,
Over all that remains of your bones.

A candle goes out when you snuff it,
A captain goes down with his team—
I think that you might as well stuff it,
Dream up a redundancy scheme.

On your trike! as the ferrety Tebbit
Might have said when the party was poop:
Now Dorset has left you in debit,
And landed the flies in your soup.

What? Who booked your body to bury
In seven-foot S.H.I.T.?
And who bit your last lot of cherry?
Your mirror will answer you: Me.

It isn't, as rumour surmises,
That yours is the will o' the wimp,
Nor that you're the booby of prizes.
You're merely a junior Blimp.

The Liberals gave you a pasting;
It could have been Screaming Lord Sutch.
It isn't *your* time that you're wasting—
It's *ours*, alas, thanks very much.

With his biceps, the gravedigger's waiting,
As Beckett once nearly remarked:
I know that it must be frustrating,
But really the nation is narked.

This Is Your Life, and the last one,
The ultimate chapter and annal—
And the plug that they're pulling's a fast one.
The show's found a different channel.

*Bill Greenwell*



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# The Tories' new poor law

The No Turning Back Group might be best described as a bunch of bastards. They are all Eurosceptics, though only a few of them had the courage to vote against the government on the social chapter the other day. They take their lead from the Social Security Secretary, Peter Lilley, who has stuck to his cabinet seat like glue. Without the NTB group behind him, Lilley might have been deprived of it long ago. As we now know, John Major did not want him outside the tent causing trouble with the rest of them.

The name says it all: no turning back. The group was formed to stiffen Margaret Thatcher's resistance to the "wets" in her cabinet. So you can imagine what its members think of the Conservatives' present leader. Yet they have a certain inviolable status within their party. They believe, and others agree, that the future belongs to them. Major is but the interregnum between Thatcher and Michael Portillo. They are convinced that their ideas will triumph, because nobody else has any.

Middle-of-the-road Tories are afraid of offending them. Their pamphlets are published by the Conservative Political Centre, the political education wing of Conservative Central Office. And, when it comes to social security matters, they have good friends in the cabinet. The key players in this autumn's public spending review are the very same Lilley and Treasury chief secretary Portillo. As for the Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, he will be looking to impress them if he wants to enter Number Ten.

*Who benefits? Reinventing social security* has just been published by five NTB members, all of whom are new to parliament but have already made a name for themselves: Alan Duncan, author of a Demos pamphlet on reforming the City; Iain Duncan Smith, a formidable Maastricht rebel; John Whittingdale, Lady Thatcher's former aide; and Bernard Jenkin and Barry Legg. They have used the pamphlet to throw up ideas in the same way as rightwing think-tanks such as the Adam Smith Institute did at the beginning of the Thatcher years. The existence of a gaping £50 billion hole in the public finances is a gift to them, as it provides a receptive audience among Tories who oppose otherwise inevitable tax increases.

The authors claim that their proposals are "designed to produce a better welfare system: a system which addresses the needs of the poorest people in society". As one might expect, however, their main motivation is to cut public spending. But they are also interested in more than just cost-cutting. They have conceived of an ambitious plan to split welfare into two tiers: private and public. Deliberately seizing on one of the Prime Minister's favourite phrases, they have called this "the privatisation of choice". That choice is only available to those who can afford it.

There is a strong whiff of Victorian values to this pamphlet. The authors cite approvingly the private provision of welfare in the late 19th century, when friendly societies flourished (out of fear of the workhouse, they omit to say). They want people to opt out of unemployment and invality benefits and the basic state pension, receiving a cut in their national insurance contributions in return for going private. Once opted-out, there is no turning back. People would not be allowed to opt back in.

One inevitable consequence of these proposals is that the poor would once again be divided in two: between the respectable poor and what turn of the century reformers used to call "the residuum". The residuum would be provided with a "minimum income". How minimum we are not told. But once they have been stigmatised as improvident, how generous would taxpayers feel? This is where a touch of the New Poor Law's dreaded "less eligibility" is bound to creep in. Only if public welfare is made unpalatable will people be sure to go private.

**The No Turning Back Group believes its ideas will triumph because nobody else has any**

In their scheme of things, universal benefits such as child benefit would be scrapped; the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme would be abolished; and the period of entitlement to unemployment benefit cut from one year to six months. The state pension age would be equalised for men and women at 65, rising to 67 in future. Rent rebates and rent allowances would be scrapped, but so would that middle-class subsidy, mortgage interest tax relief (a notable plus).

Also on the plus side, the authors want to integrate the tax and benefit systems—the holy grail of all reformers. They believe that new technology can be harnessed to produce a "smart card" with people's data on it that can be updated according to changing circumstances. Thus, you could introduce a "Whole Person Benefit", with allowances for lone parents, disabled people, carers, people who need help with their rent and so on. In theory, it should make social security cheaper and easier to administer.

In one important respect, these No Turning Back MPs might not be such bastards after all. They recommend a tapering system for people on benefits that would allow them to receive earnings and escape the poverty trap. Everyone likes tapering, as it provides an incentive to work. It could lead, however, not so much to the New Poor Law of 1834 but to the Speenhamland system of out-relief that preceded it. It does not come cheap, as people would be kept on benefits for longer than they are at present—and some people in work might become eligible for help. And, it could end up subsidising a low-wage economy, just as, under Speenhamland, the parish picked up the bill for low agricultural wages. This suggests that the authors have yet to cost their scheme—or, as may well be the case, that they intend to keep benefits punitively small. We just cannot tell whether their idea of a minimum income bears any relation to what people can actually live on.

The pamphlet bears all the signs of having been thrown together hastily. The authors not only dismiss the idea of "relative poverty", but imply that everyone has been getting wealthier, when we now know that the income of the poorest 10 per cent of households has fallen by 14 per cent in real terms since 1979; and that of the top 10 per cent has risen by over 50 per cent. They also recommend privatising job centres and job training schemes, as if the Astra scandal had never happened. This privatised training agency was claiming £1,000 bonuses off the state for finding people jobs lasting no more than a week before it finally went into receivership. Quite simply, it could not make money by obtaining real jobs for people when there were none available.

*Who benefits?* is a very good advertisement for the work of Labour's Social Justice Commission. Though the latter's slow timetable is inevitably frustrating, it was right to set out the values informing its thinking before rushing to conclusions. The No Turning Back pamphlet has nothing to say about preventing rather than relieving poverty; about extending opportunities and life-chances to everyone; and about eliminating unjust inequalities. It talks about meeting people's basic needs, but not as a "right" as the Social Justice Commission does. It fails to satisfy what the Commission calls the foundation of a free society: "the equal worth of citizens". But one thing is certain, it will be influential.



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## SIDELINERS

**On my first visit to Baghdad in 1946, I was taken with a pretty young local tribeswoman on a donkey, with the word "OXO" tattooed on her forehead. She had not hired out her forehead as advertising space. Her local tattooist had simply copied the balanced design from a tin sign.**

**If the idea catches on here, the letters "OMOV" should be tattooed on almost a whole new tribe of Labour local politicians coming to Westminster after the next election.**

**The days of articulate, London-based cause groupies or MPs' assistants trailing around to selection conferences are over, insists Labour's Baroness (Patricia) Hollis, ex-leader of Norwich city council. So are the chances for middle-ranking trade unionists picked for last year's election because of a T&G, GMB and Nupe carve-up. Once one member, one vote (OMOV) is in place, those with strong local reputations will have an advantage in winning over local party members over flash outsiders or officials unknown outside their unions.**

**This move toward local people has already begun. Denis Healey, parachuted into Leeds East from Transport House, has been replaced by George Mudie, ex-leader of Leeds city council. Merlyn Rees was replaced in Morley and Leeds South by John Gunnell, ex-leader of West Yorkshire metropolitan council. Nick Ainger was a Dyfed county councillor before being chosen to oust Pembroke's egregious Tory, Nick Bennett. John ("Jaws") Austin-Walker was leader of Greenwich borough council before ousting the popular SDP defector John Cartwright. John Denham was helped in his ousting of Chris Chope from Itchen, Southampton, by having been a Southampton city councillor and a Hampshire county councillor.**

**The usefulness of a low-profile local councillor type in even a high-profile by-election has been demonstrated dramatically by the unprecedented victory of the new Lib-Dem MP for Christchurch, Diana Maddock. John Denham, who served with her on Southampton council, has said she was an unexciting and unoriginal lady there. But perhaps even the absence of pyrotechnics helped make this schoolteacher-turned-housewife-and-organiser a better receptacle for the ex-Tory voters deserting their party in droves for tactical voting. Despite the many spotlights on Christchurch, she never put a foot wrong, mopping up all the votes the Lib-Dems could possibly have scraped together. The best of the three main candidates may have been Labour's articulate barrister, Nigel Lickley. But Maddock produced the goods. She even had a nice line in "more bobbies on the beat" for ex-Tories wanting to hang, draw and quarter burglars.**

**It is possible that Maddock will not be a scintillating MP, a quiet Ray Michie rather than a hyperactive Liz Lynne on the Lib-Dem benches. But glibness is not all. Gordon Brown is one of Labour's most articulate frontbenchers, able to produce brilliant one-liners and 30-second soundbites. But as shadow Treasury spokesperson last September he could not recognise the elephantine need for devaluation even on the eve of "black Wednesday".**

*Andrew Roth*

## EDWARD PEARCE

# The Liberal-Democrats are looking less and less like one-night sensations

In the excitement of Christchurch, things tend to get overlooked. Certainly everybody hated the Conservatives on 29 July 1993. But we all play the exponential game. What might be called Snow's Complaint has us hopping about in front of the computer graphics explaining that this result means deluge. One can only recite the fallen: Eastbourne, Ribble Valley, Vale of Glamorgan, Mid Staffordshire.

Labour has least to rejoice at. True, if you go back to Orpington, the Ur by-election, the Labour candidate also lost his deposit. Nobody worried about that and Labour it was that formed a government two years later.

Today is different. Never mind Labour's ten second places, the preponderance of Liberals in the south grows impressive. First party in southern polls, dominant party with Labour support in that great swathe of southern councils, Liberal strength begins to feel entrenchments beneath its feet, it looks and feels so much less like a party of magnesium flares and one-night sensations. If anyone is going to make a leap forward in the south, it will be the party already ensconced in local government there and the party psychologically accessible for Conservative voters. *Their* defection makes the swing and they don't defect to Labour.

**If Paddy Ashdown can make a government, he will want to join one bringing a pledge to enact PR**

Admittedly Labour began in the last parliament to win by-elections again—biggish swing at Mid Staffs, little swing at Lanbaurgh—and lost again at the general election. But Labour needs 326 seats for simple majority status, seats like Monmouth, won at the sideshow and lost by 3,000 in the big event. How many Labour supporters really expect to win Monmouth or Brighton Pavilion in the narrow scope of a national contest? The last election yielded a 2.6 swing when 6 per cent was needed for victory. If there was another 2.6 swing, Labour would just pass the 300 mark and, however blinkered the northern constituency parties towards "yellow Tories", it would be in the direction of Mr Ashdown's little platoon that longing looks would be cast. On the same necessarily simplistic arithmetic, a uniform 2.6 per cent swing from the Conservatives to all second parties, would put the Liberals seven seats ahead of April 1992. Realistically, they will do much better than that. Established as more than a congeries of local forces across the south, they could easily be placed for a 20-30 seat leap as the southern alternative to the Tories.

There is, of course, all sorts of shadow cabinet dark thinking about such eventualities, the commonest a Royal Commission on PR. A less snooty option is a referendum. If Paddy Ashdown is any sort of man, he will throw the commission back with a light laugh. Plant has demonstrated paralytic lethargy enough. No one else owes Mr Smith further excuses to huddle in the warm hollow of the status quo. The referendum is slightly more promising since it would expect to carry, but anticipate a precise form of PR stipulated to avoid backsliding.

But don't count on acceptance. If Mr Ashdown can make a government, he will want to join one bringing a pledge to enact PR. "Ah," say the regular Labour men, "but he can't support the Tories. He will have to be content with supporting a minority Labour government. This is the moral conceit of the *déclassé* Labour still thinking like a natural single party of government. Recognising that it is not is the condition precedent to governing us all.

Mr Major has his travails on an overall majority starting at 20, now 16. Would the proposed minority government have no crises, nothing going wrong, no loss of popularity? Imagine it 16 months into office, after its second bad night with Peter Snow. Would it then be on stronger or weaker terms *vis-à vis* Mr Ashdown than if he were a member of the said unpopular government and his party's future dependent on light at the end of a five-year tunnel?

Speaking of which, the Conservatives are 16 months into a 60-month term. They have devalued the pound on the weakest labour market for 50 years. Two years of growth at 4 per cent, coupled with interest rates of 4 per cent and many hundreds of thousands of jobs, are all very thinkable. Added to which, thanks to the unbelievable lethargy of Mr Smith in letting Kevin MacNamara think green thoughts aloud, the true working majority for the government is 36! Thoughts of cups, lips and extreme prudence are very much in order.



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Felix Bennett

Term is over at Westminster House School. **Mat Coward** looks back at the academic year that achieved high marks for scandal, pathos, and general rowdiness

# Tries hard but could do better

This term, as many of you have not been slow to point out, has been a somewhat difficult one for Westminster House School for Boys (Mainly).

It has seen two rustications, those of Messrs Lamont and Mates; the latter for dishonesty in a matter involving the Stamp and Coin Club, the former because he was so revolting we just couldn't bear to have him around any longer. I shall pass no further comment here, except to hope that we can now draw a line beneath these deplorable events.

As always, in the mixed weave that goes to make up the kaleidoscopic tapestry that is a single term in the life of an ancient school such as Westminster House, the good is twined inextricably with the bad.

Exam results have, on the whole, been satisfactory. The Coal Module of the Business Studies course gave us all a few nasty moments some months back, but, come the results, our fears proved to have been groundless. As so often! On the other hand, the entire school continues to struggle with French and German Comprehension, to the extent that the external examiners have warned of the possibility of results being imposed from above. Looking at this positively, however, perhaps it would be no bad thing; the examiners speak of supplying several Panzer Divisions which, I believe, are audio-visual aids of some sort.

The school has always prided itself on a lively sporting programme, and this term was no exception. In inter-house matches, Gold has been thrashing Blue with an inevitability that would be more impressive, if only it were attributable to anything other than a seemingly endless chain of ill-advised declarations on the part of Blue's captain. The 1st XI's annual fixture against the Old Boys was, it must be said, a bad-tempered match, which ended in an unsatisfactory draw, amid accusations of gamesmanship on both sides. It is very much to be hoped that we can now draw a line beneath this unfortunate matter.

While on the subject, I must address a plea to former pupils. We are, of course, always glad to receive visits from Old Boys, and indeed Old Girls, but not when they appear to be interfering with the smooth running of the school, and introducing younger pupils to bad habits. This applies to all Old Boys. And indeed Old Girls.

Red House, sad to say, has played little part in school life of late, either on or off the pitch. In fact, I would be grateful if Red's captain would find time to report to my office during the holidays, as he has yet to make himself known to me.

Disciplinary problems have also cast their shadow over the summer term. I am loathe to mention any individual names, but suffice it so say that a certain Michael H needs a haircut, and is going to get one, no matter how long he hides; that one Virginia B could usefully apply the same energy to her studies as she applies to flirting; that Kenneth C has perhaps changed courses in mid-stream once too often for his academic ambitions to be taken entirely seriously; and that when it comes to young John P—well, I'm sure we all wish him better, but if he produces just one more crudely forged sick note, I shall begin to suspect that he is (as the young people say) "swinging the jolly old lead"!

As for the beastly boy Rupert: that, I fear, is a name which I no longer wish to hear within these walls. A sad business all round. One can only hope that a line might now be drawn under that distressing episode. One doesn't wish to sound harsh, but really—loyalty is as



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loyalty does, in my (no doubt woefully old-fashioned) opinion. Enough said. Let us turn to happier matters.

Our new matron is settling in well. She is a mature lady of impeccable background and varied experience, and Westminster House is very lucky to have secured her services. A few prefects complain that she is excessively strict, but I am confident that accusations of "throwing her weight around" are attributable to nothing more than sour grapes. I do believe that half the boys are half in love with her already. (As for the other half—well, some problems, it would seem, are always with us. Discretion is, I am sure, the best watchword here).

Reluctantly, I am forced to consider a review of the long-standing practice of allowing the tuck shops to remain open all day, as too many pupils abuse this privilege, and turn up for lessons literally reeking of cherryade. This would perhaps be an opportune moment to mention the prickly subject of punctuality. Our tradition of not beginning the day's classes until the afternoon becomes increasingly difficult to justify, and I would point out that we do expect students to do at least a little work on their own account outside these hours. Well, perhaps not expect exactly, but at least hope.

The use of foul language is undeniably on the increase, even amongst senior boys who should know better. Words like ****, ********, **1*, and, most especially, ******-*******-****!!!***, are not ones that we consider appropriate to the school environment. In future, it would be appreciated if pupils would attempt to express their (no doubt sincerely held) views less offensively: terms such as Cad, Blinkin' Twit, and Most Considerably Rotten would seem to fit the bill.

A lot of nonsense has been talked this year about "bugs". To hear some ill-informed prattlers, one might conclude that the school were positively crawling with "bugs"! There are "bugs", we are asked to believe, in every dormitory, every study cubicle, even in the Governors' Office itself! Let me assure all parents and prospective parents here and now that this supposed plague is in fact an entire lot of tosh. We are not "bugged" at Westminster: we suffer neither from cockroaches, nor from listeria. Those who suggest otherwise are, one is forced to conclude, merely the type who glory in running the school down at every opportunity.

Let me also reassure those who have had the misfortune to be exposed to ugly rumours of an improper relationship between the head boy and the school cook. It is always a mystery to me how these bogus scandals arise—though in this particular case, we need not perhaps search too far afield for the culprits. As far as I have been able to establish, what began as a rather spiteful exercise in irony by some disaffected prefects simply got out of hand. At one time, the boy concerned was considering legal action, which might have proved embarrassing all round; in the end, wiser heads prevailed, allowing a line to be drawn beneath the whole affair. (Not that there was one).

I must now perform a duty that is becoming something of an annual ritual, and, with much regret, inform you that the school's finances are anything but healthy. We have, so far, managed to avoid raising fees directly (although I make no promises in this regard for next term), and some ground may be reclaimed by reducing scholarships for poor children, one-parent families and so on, who, I know you will agree, do not always appreciate the facilities offered them in any case.

But there seems little possibility of avoiding an increase in peripheral costs: uniform, books, etc. Ask me why this happens year after year, and I can only reply: I honestly haven't the foggiest. God knows, we're doing our best. No doubt it is something to do with Europe, as most things seem to be these days.

Relations between the school and the wider community, I am sorry to report, continue to deteriorate. Our beloved school is, one fears, seen more and more by those beyond its walls as an anachronistic, corrupt, purposeless club for degenerates. This worries me; what was I saying just now about discretion? Transparency is not always a virtue.

Term ended on a high point, something we could all agree on at last: a thrilling performance of the school play—*Confidence*, an old favourite revived—before a packed house in the main hall. After a period in which epithets such as bully, sneak, blackmailer and incompetent wretch have filled the air like wasps at a picnic, it was good to be able to finish on a note, albeit a cautious one, of unity and optimism.

I can only pray, in concluding this report, that the whole school now feels able to draw a line beneath its late troubles and, er, blah blah blah—just stick something meaningful on the end here, will you, and then get it off to the printers before they go bust? There's a dear.



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**Perhaps it's the summer heat, or possibly the depletion of the ozone layer, but there were some unusually strong expressions of opinion in the mailbag this week. Robert Briggs, of Leicester, calls our discussion of drugs law ("Legalise it?", 23 July) a "damned disgrace". A "socialist since the age of 15 (I am now 51)", he says that "trafficking, dealing or taking of drugs should be an offence for which no penalty is too severe". Although Briggs is "against the death penalty in principle . . . If they started the mass hanging of men and women for this offence, I would not lose any sleep at all."**

**Helen Miller, of Glasgow, doesn't quite advocate mass hangings, but she does approve of violence. She is at odds with Mat Coward (Backchat, 23 July), however, about who it should be directed against: "Isn't it typical of those wishy-washy liberals like Mat Coward that the one group in society he advocates violence against is hunters? Personally I'd reserve it for those who cause endless suffering to their fellow human beings: tobacco manufacturers, arms manufacturers, those who leave their dogs barking all day in their gardens . . . Let the rabbits, foxes etc take their chances. After all, it's a tough world out there."**

**I have also been contacted about Mat Coward's article by Shooting News & Country Weekly, whose editor, Vic Gardner, writes: "We have had a number of telephone calls about this article by Mat Coward from people who hunt foxes who do not want to be shot at." (For the benefit of those who did not read Coward's piece, he suggested that "fox-hunting could be brought to an end more or less overnight by a few well-planned but seemingly random murders—murders that, I must make it perfectly clear here, I in every way advocate.") Gardner says he is doing a story and feels "it is imperative that you have the opportunity to defend your decision to publish this article". I am currently considering whether to do so, or, in keeping with the spirit of this week's correspondence, responding like Goebbels when he heard the word "culture" —and reaching for my gun.**

**The letter from David Carman, of Seaford, contented itself with verbal violence. "At present you're doing a marvellous impression of a magazine that ISN'T progressive, egalitarian and exciting," he writes. "By my calculation, I'm paying 3p each week to read Jaci Stephen eruditely comparing the hair of Arthur Scargill and Neil Kinnock . . . 3½p for Laurie Taylor to conduct his angst-ridden psychoanalytic sessions in print . . . and 3½p for Sean French to spin a column out of trivia such as 'Yesterday my lawn mower went on the blink and I thought "That's just how the second world war started" . . .' Could I possibly subscribe at a cut rate with the offending items cut out?" No, David, you can't.**

**Carman also said a few things about Roger Woddis's verse, none of which merit repetition here. Instead, I will finish with a poem of the kind Roger himself might have written, sent to me by his old friend Gavin Ewart. You can sing it in the bath (or maybe the cinema). It's called "Jurassic Park (An entrepreneur sings)".**

**And did those feet in ancient time**
**Walk upon England's mountains green?**
**And were the scaly dinosaurs**
**On England's swampy pastures seen?**

**And did Tyrannosaurus Rex**
**Bound forth upon our clouded hills?**
**And did Jurassic forms amaze?**
**And shall they now not fill the tills?**

**Bring me my Screen of silver bright!**
**Bring me my Merchandising Skills!**
**Bring me my Toys! T-shirts of Fright!**
**Bring me my million Dollar Bills!**

**I will not cease from Fiscal Fight,**
**With Dollar, Yen and Krugerrand,**
**Till we have built Jurassic Parks**
**In England's green and peasant land.**

*Steve Platt*

## Bitter lemon

Your editorial ("Labour lemons", 30 July) was full of the usual deceitful arguments about forcing Labour into organising in Northern Ireland. The assertion that people have a "right" to be able to join a political party is nonsense. It is for each political party to determine how and where it organises and who it permits to join.

It is simply naive to believe that any mainland party attempting to organise in Northern Ireland can alter the the sectarian divisions and change perceptions and beliefs held for centuries. One only has to witness the idiocy of the Apprentice Boys' parades, with grown men insisting on their "right" to "march where my daddy marched", regardless of the provocation, contribution to sectarianism and escalation of violence that this causes.

Far from Kevin McNamara's document *Oranges and Lemons* being "vaguely racist", I suspect it is *NSS* that is closer to being guilty of such a charge. To believe that all that is required to end sectarian voting is for a mainland British party to organise there is incredulous. The first question Labour would be asked in Ireland would not be about housing or education, but on where it stands on the Union.

Labour's policy is clear. It stands for the eventual unification of Ireland. On that basis, it would be rejected by the unionist voters, who continually elect Tory-supporting politicians to Westminster, and finds itself in direct competition with the SDLP, which you casually dismiss, even though it is Labour's sister party in the Socialist International.

In truth, the only reason why the campaign to organise in Northern Ireland is being promoted is not in the hope of gaining seats, nor out of any sense of concern that people in the province "have a right" to join the Labour Party. It is nothing other than a back-door attempt to force Labour to change its policy on Northern Ireland. As only unionists would join a mainland party, one can see where the erroneously named Democracy Now group is coming from.

The unionist voters presently return the likes of Ian Paisley and Peter Robinson to parliament. These are men of the hard right, committed to the entrenchment of sectarian division. If working-class unionist voters wanted to vote to ease the sectarian tensions, then other parties—not just the SDLP—exist, such as the centrist Alliance Party.

In mainland Britain, Labour voters have a tendency to vote Liberal Democrat when they perceive Labour has little chance of success, or where locally it does not field a candidate. Faced with a similar choice, the unionist voters continue to return politicians who are part of the Conservative and Unionist Alliance, that helped bring down the last Labour government and recently saved John Major's government.

I trust *NSS* readers do not need reminding which lobby the SDLP was in on both occasions.

*Chris Roberts*
*London SE18*

*The editor replies: If you live in Dublin, you can join the Labour Party; if you live in Belfast, you can't. Some people in Northern Ireland wish to join Labour; they should have the same right to do so in the north as in the republic.*

## Labour's lead balloon

Gordon Brown chose the eve of the Christchurch poll to announce that the Labour Party had abandoned any intention of increasing taxation on salaries above £40,000, or national insurance contributions on salaries above £21,000.

I don't know what it did for the voters of Christchurch (not much, judging by Labour's abysmal vote there), but it did nothing to cheer me up.

The reasoning behind Brown's statement, so it is said, is that the party must rid itself of the image of the party of high taxation. The irony is that the Lib Dems, who had most to lose given that they risked being blown off course from a sensational electoral victory, put up Charles Kennedy 24 hours before the poll to say unequivocally that his party's alternative to VAT on domestic fuel was to increase income tax, albeit by a modest 1 per cent.

Evidently, the Lib Dems saw no reason to fear that Kennedy's statement would put off the Christchurch voters, and they were dead right. Just which voters was Gordon Brown



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chasing? Lord Hanson and Sir Ralph Halpern may sleep more soundly in their beds now, but Brown's message must have descended on the party's natural and historical constituency, the working class, like a lead balloon.

*Leslie Moody*
*London SE3*

## Thank you, Keith

I suffer a minor disappointment every time I read *NSS* and find that there is no letter from Keith Flett (Letters, 16 July). He gives the right (correct) answer to those on the left he finds fault with and a left, equally correct, answer to those on the right. Thank you, Keith.

*John P Mathieson*
*Glenrothes*
*Fife*

## Alcoholically incorrect

Roger Protz ("Bitter struggles", 30 July) is quite right to talk of a "crisis at the heart of the brewing industry". But surely, in the pages of *NSS*, he can be a bit more forthright about what the nature of the crisis is?

He is right, of course, that the big brewers' subversion of the intention of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's 1989 report into the beerage is the source of the crisis. But the roots go much deeper than this.

The trend in brewing, as in capitalism generally, is towards merger and monopoly. Thus, a few international leisure companies, which see pubs and beer as only one of a number of activities, are coming to dominate beer production. To cap it all, since the big brewers remain one of the few reliable donors of funds to the Tory party, it is unlikely that Michael Heseltine is going to do anything much about their increasingly dominant position in the marketplace.

This means, and the nettle really will have to be grasped soon, that the Campaign for Real Ale is going to have to become political. No amount of fiddling with beer regulations is going to protect traditional ale. What will, is a mass and active campaign by beer drinkers and, crucially, organised workers in the brewing business, to make it plain to both the industrial and political wings of the Tory party that the demand for decent beer cannot be ignored. It's either that or socialist revolution.

*Keith Flett*
*London N17*

## THIS ENGLAND

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•MPs were not told of the government's 1984 guidelines on defence exports to Iraq for ten months because officials drafting written answers were told to save paper, Sir Stephen Egerton, Foreign Office under-secretary, told the Scott inquiry.—*Daily Telegraph* (Brenda Rowe)

•My own family have been intruded upon by the press in the past. I have smashed a guy's camera over his head and kicked in the windows of his car. He didn't press charges because he was in the wrong. —Lord Glenconner's son Charlie Tennant in the *London Evening Standard* (Sigrid Rabiger)

## General stupidity

As your editorial says ("If there were an election . . . " 30 July), congratulations are indeed in order for the way John Smith handled the Maastricht social protocol debate. The government survived only because it was prepared to sacrifice the delicate political balance in Northern Ireland for the sake of its own parliamentary security.

But Labour didn't really walk through the lobbies "united". Some MPs went through thinking that Maastricht and the social chapter were great; others thinking that the social chapter is Maastricht's only redeeming feature. An opposition that "stifles" its "rows" (democratic debate?) over such an important constitutional issue is neither desirable nor healthy. Minimum wages, statutory holidays and maximum working hours are desperately needed in Britain, but the limiting of possibilities for democratic change through the centralisation of power in Europe certainly isn't.

Labour's days of opposition to the EC (or, more correctly, to the free-market principles to which the Treaty of Rome wedded us) are now long forgotten, and the electorate must surely view the party as more "federalist" than the government. This might not be immediately unpopular with the voters, but once again Maastricht—and the EMS—is falling apart everywhere.

And if there were an election tomorrow? Who knows? The Lib Dems would probably gain a few seats on the tide of Newbury and Christchurch. But Labour, rather than admit that the general public is stupid enough to believe the Tory media, is obsessed by private ownership, or is just plain greedy, might well have to find a new scapegoat. We are told they lost in 1983 because of the "scarecrow" factor (blame Michael Foot and CND); in 1987 because of the "feel good" factor (blame Thatcher); and in 1992 because of the "feel bad" factor (blame Major and Lamont). Whatever next?

*Simon Kyte*
*Winkfield*
*Berkshire*

## A capital occupation

Fred Halliday enthuses that "the Czech Republic is enjoying the best economic conditions of any postwar state" (Letter from Prague, 16 July). I believe this analysis can be regarded merely as a facade, hiding serious long-term problems. The divorce with Slovakia has divided one aspiring state into two small, hopeful states. The relentless drive towards the "nirvana" of the market under prime minister Vaclav Klaus in the Czech Republic has seen the icons of the party leaders replaced by the new icons of Coca-Cola and McDonald's. As John Tusa pointed out in a recent BBC2 documentary on Prague, the rapid modernisation and westernisation of the city is in danger of destroying one of the most beautiful skylines and last unspoilt cities in Europe. The restitution programme, although well meant, was ultimately flawed, because many who reclaimed property could not afford to keep it. Consequently, rents in Prague have rocketed as property is made available for tourists. Many areas of Prague are already tourist-only zones, with the locals priced out to the rural areas. As for the ex-communists, they may well be one of the major benefactors of this rapid change, along with foreign investors.

The long-suffering Czech people have endured two occupying forces and kept their capital city unscathed. Whether they can survive the occupying force of western capitalism remains to be seen.

*Mark Bennister*
*MA Contemporary European Studies*
*Loughborough University*

## Tupe or not Tupe

A year after public service minister William Waldegrave infamously described the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations, also called Tupe, as a "red herring", Kirsty Milne's timely article ("The dustmen's contract", 23 July) demonstrates just how wrong he and other ministers have proved to be. But there is a clear danger that we may start believing Tupe is a panacea for contracting out in its various forms. Alas, it is not.

Min Cooper



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Even where a contractor accepts that Tupe applies, unions will still have to remain very vigilant indeed to ensure that their members are fully aware at all times of their rights. Evidence is emerging, for instance, of contractors who, under the guise of needing to "harmonise" terms and conditions with those of their own workforce, will try to persuade employees to sign new agreements prior to the transfer. Thus, when the transfer subsequently takes place, it is the new agreement that applies, not the old one. Agreements can obviously also be entered into after the transfer.

Why should anyone voluntarily agree to change their terms and conditions if they can rely on the full force of Tupe? Employees may well be offered a higher monthly salary as an inducement to agree to join the new company's pension and redundancy schemes. Contractors recognise that the costs of maintaining public-sector pensions and redundancy entitlements are likely to be prohibitive to both winning, and making an acceptable level of profit on, contracts.

As well as insisting Tupe applies, unions will therefore need to be as fully involved as possible in advising their members throughout market tests and contracting-out exercises. Where Tupe applies, it is vital that unions remain wary of unscrupulous contractors who may try, within the scope of the law, to mitigate what they consider to be its worst effects, to the ultimate detriment of our members.

*Barry Reamsbottom*
*General Secretary, CPSA*
*London SW11*

## Call for a brave man

The recent deaths of two ANC leaders who had admitted that they were spies for the South African security services are reported in the South African press as possible murders. These two ran the London ANC in the 1980s: Solly Smith was the chief representative, and Francis Meli chaired the regional committee covering London.

These two men were responsible for the suspension from ANC membership of David and Norma Kitson, following David's return to Britain in 1984. David Kitson was one of the longest serving prisoners of apartheid in South Africa. He was sent to prison for 20 years in 1964 for his activities as a member of the high command of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the ANC's military wing. This suspension from the ANC led to withdrawal of the promise by Tass, David's trade union, to "help him build a new life" after his release by funding a fellowship for him at Ruskin College, Oxford.

"My suspension," says Kitson, "was intended to starve me and my family into submission, a procedure successfully applied to other ANC members in London." The suspensions led to wide repercussions, not just for all of his family, but also wrought havoc in the whole anti-apartheid movement in Britain.

Vigorous action to reverse the Tass boycott has been carried out by a Justice for Kitson campaign within his union, as well as in the anti-apartheid, labour and wider trade union movements. This was met with venomous opposition. It was difficult at the time to understand, but seems credible now that it turns out two major leaders of the ANC in London were working for the SA police.

David has now written to Roger Lyons, general secretary of MSF (successor to Tass), pointing out that the suspensions that caused the union to renege on its promise to him have now been withdrawn. His case is now being re-examined within the union.

By his principled and courageous stand against apartheid, David Kitson earned himself 20 years in one of the most sinister jails in the world. He also earned no income for himself and his family, and no pension. We join him in his call on MSF to fulfil its promise and provide an income for this brave man.

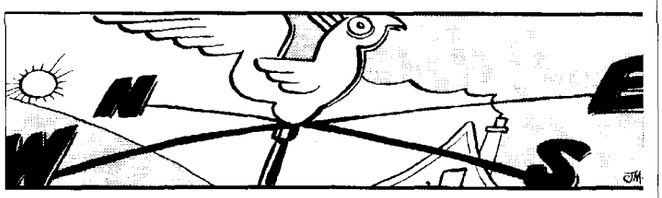
*Richard Stone, Ian Rez, Rene Waller, Lena Prior, Mary Barnett, Henry Barnett, Hugh MacGrillen and Debbie Potts*
*Justice for Kitson Campaign*
*London NW8*

## Bastard measure

John Major claims that there are three bastards in the cabinet. I make it 22.

*John Gorman*
*Waltham Abbey*
*Essex*

# FRINGE BENEFITS



**Colin Ward** listens with interest to the examiners' inquest

This is the time of year when vast numbers of 16 year olds (quite apart from the 18 year olds sweating for their A-level results) await with trepidation, resignation or indifference the verdict on them from the GCSE examiners.

If you listen to the pronouncements of an endless succession of education ministers, you would imagine that no child had ever sat for an examination until they came along. But the fact is that, for decades, secondary education has been exam-oriented. CSEs were introduced because of justified complaints that the old GCE O-level was geared to the demands of universities to which an overwhelming majority did not go.

It was during the regime of Keith Joseph (remember him?) that GCSEs were introduced, after a decade of working parties, to combine O-level and CSE in a single exam. Most teachers think it a most enlightened approach in most subjects. Naturally this means that it isn't going to last much longer.

The other evening, sitting with several examiners I know, I eavesdropped, fascinated, on the private language they develop, and was awed by the cross-checking, standardisation and validation of marks that end up as a piece of computerised data.

Now that the gruelling and ill-paid task of marking was over, they relaxed and discussed general trends. Obviously, with a pile of scripts from some school or college unknown to them, the markers can recognise the influence of a particular teacher, and can even identify the textbook that has been used.

But there is also a recognisable factor that we have to call the *Zeitgeist*, the atmosphere that teenagers absorb from the media and from mealtime conversation. It is not accidental that History has been, even more than English, or the arts, the most contentious school subject in the national curriculum, introduced by a government that, in 1979, campaigned on the slogan: set the people free. It is one of the few where there has been direct prime-ministerial intervention.

All the examining boards have a syllabus for world history since the first world war, usually centred around the modern history of Russia, China, the United States and Germany. (I have always argued for an alternative curriculum based on Scandinavia, Tanzania, Brazil and Burma.) This year, the examiners observed that China is out, the Soviet Union has lost its popularity, except for the analysis of Stalin, and that the favourite topics are the response to the Great Depression in the United States and in Nazi Germany.

But some exam-markers discerned the view that the New Deal's insistence on trade-union recognition was a weakness and that Adolf Hitler's suppression of the unions a strength.

They also discerned the interpretation that, while the Nazi route to full employment through the arms industry was a good thing for Germany, the New Deal job-creation was a waste of public money on silly gimmicks.

I overheard with curiosity and interest the discussion from the examination-room about the answers that 16 year olds give, observing that the reputation of the Roosevelt era is at its lowest ebb in the United States, while in that country, and in France, Russia and indeed Britain, there are tiny groups of neo-Nazis whose proudest symbol is the banner of the National Socialist German Workers' Party.

The other thing examiners do in August is to collect the most hilarious exam howlers to send to a feature in the *Times Educational Supplement*.

The one I picked up from the examiners' chat was that of the student who explained that the Nazi party emblem was a black Schwarzenegger on a red background.



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Martin Ince

Yet another privatisation is in the wind. **David Beskine** wonders what on earth will be achieved by selling off the Forestry Commission

# The dash for cash

Unlike earlier privatisations, there appear to be few voices calling for the privatisation of the Forestry Commission. Indeed, there is massive, virtually across-the-board, opposition emerging. But the government appears to be moving inexorably in this direction. So who is behind the tiny group pushing for privatisation, and why should the government be considering it in the face of such potentially massive opposition?

The Forestry Commission was set up in 1919 to rebuild Britain's strategic supply of timber, a commodity in short supply following the 1914-18 war. Since then, the Commission has become Britain's biggest landowner, with approximately 2.75 million acres, of which about two million is forested. This represents around 40 per cent of all Britain's woodlands.

Over the years, it has had to shoulder its fair share of the blame for environmentally—and aesthetically—disastrous tree-planting schemes, especially in the Scottish uplands. This has changed recently, and the Commission has begun championing what is called "multipurpose forestry": successfully combining commercial timber production, public access and recreation, and good conservation/environmental practices. The way environmental and recreation groups have rushed to speak up for the now threatened Commission is testimony to its work.

The Commission's policy on public access, for instance, is exemplary, allowing the "freedom to roam" on all its freehold land—something anathema to most private woodland owners. The Commission estimates that there are about 50 million day visits to its land every year, a considerable public benefit.

During last year's general election campaign, John Major told the forestry trade unions: "There is no intention to privatise the Forestry Commission." This pledge was later repeated on 11 May in the Commons by forestry minister Sir Hector Monro: "We have made it clear on a number of occasions that we have no intention of privatising the Forestry Commission. That remains the position."

But, just two months later, part of a letter from John Gummer, then agriculture minister, which made it clear he was pressing for privatisation of the Commission, was leaked to the *Guardian*. This was followed a couple of months later by the first sign of a U-turn by Major. His office issued a statement declaring that his general-election promise had been issued in error, "during the frenzied activity of the election campaign". The true position was that the government had "no plans *at present*" (my italics) to privatise the Commission. Six months later, at the end of March 1993, this statement was followed by the announcement of the creation of the Forestry Review Group: a team of (mainly) civil servants charged, among other things, with considering options for "the ownership" of the Forestry Commission's land.

The announcement of the Forestry Review Group had two results. It blew wide open the split in government on whether to privatise, and galvanised and united the thinking of the many disparate (and sometimes hitherto opposing) groups interested in forestry.

Information emerging from ministers' offices led observers to conclude that Major and

**Walking in the woods: a thing of the past?**

Gummer, then still at Agriculture, favoured outright privatisation. Major on ideological, pro-privatisation grounds alone; Gummer because it would, in addition, present an opportunity for his ministry to increase its influence on forestry policy, by absorbing some of the regulatory functions currently carried out by the Commission. Secretary of State for Scotland, Ian Lang, who is also the lead UK minister of forestry, is said not to be in favour of privatisation; neither is his junior, the earlier pledge-giving Hector Monro.

But behind both Major and Gummer was the presence of the Treasury, alive to the possibilities of a billion pounds of extra funds from selling off the Forestry Commission.

However, while the government might be split on this issue, those outside government are not. Almost every organisation connected with forestry has expressed a view, and a remarkable consensus has emerged. An unholy alliance of landowning, farming, industrial, professional management, trade union, conservation and recreation interests are all saying the same thing: the effect of outright privatisation of the Forestry Commission will be disastrous.

Landowners and farmers traditionally have had a great deal of influence over Conservative countryside-related policies: the large number of landowners in the House of Lords makes them, in practice, one of the most effective lobby groups in Britain. So far, the Country Landowners' Association, as well as the specialist, private forestry sector, Timber Growers United Kingdom, have expressed reservations over this privatisation.

Both groups are concerned, among other things, with the impact on the private sector of putting 40 per cent of all Britain's woods on the market. Serious, long-term financial problems arise. With rural land prices already depressed, putting 40 per cent of the nation's woods on the market could drive them down even further, technically bankrupting many farmers with mortgages greater than the new, lower, market value of their land.

Big landowners are also worried about the knock-on effect of public access being denied to newly privatised woodlands, with more pressure for access legislation and access to *their* lands. Patrick Gordon-Duff-Pennington, former convenor of the Scottish Landowners' Federation and currently chairman of the Red Deer Commission, publicly described the prospect of privatisation as: "ridiculous dogma . . . the government is talking rubbish about privatising the Commission."

Industrial interests have taken an even stronger line. They are primarily concerned about a steady flow of raw timber for the paper and wood-processing mills. The Forestry Commission acts as a benevolent supplier, maintaining a flow of timber to both large- and small-scale operators in good times and bad. If the price of timber falls, for example, private growers tend not to want to fell their trees, in the expectation of greater profits tomorrow: but the Commission sees



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its role as underpinning the wood and paper industry, and ensures a steady flow of timber.

The trade unions representing the Forestry Commission's employees have also come out strongly against privatisation. But the main plank of their argument has not been about the potential loss of jobs. They have been putting out publicity material driving the message home to the wider public, and especially those who visit Forestry Commission woodlands, that this land is currently owned by and, above all, is accessible to the public. The right to walk there may be lost if the land is sold off.

And there is good evidence emerging that public access will indeed be lost if this privatisation goes ahead. Since 1981, the Forestry Commission has been selling off woodland on the orders of government, and, to date, has disposed of about 350,000 acres. The Ramblers' Association has consistently maintained that such sales lead to loss of access, and is shortly to publish research that backs up this claim. This will show that only a tiny fraction of the new owners are prepared to continue with the Forestry Commission's former "Freedom to Roam" policy.

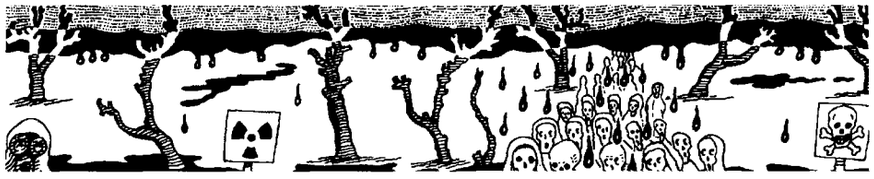
The Association of Professional Foresters, the umbrella organisation representing many of the commercial interests in forestry, endorses this. They have told the government that, in their view: "Over 90 per cent of all forest area sold by the [Forestry Commission] over the past decade now has all public access denied by the private owners." What is more: "The private sector will not be interested in purchasing forest areas which have a 'Right of Access' attached." Yet even they acknowledge that it is not practical, nor politically desirable, to terminate this valuable public benefit.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has estimated that the government would need to pay about £50 million annually to whoever took on the ownership of the Commission's land if its former conservation and recreation policies were to be maintained. If only £1 billion net were to be raised by privatisation, it would mean setting more than half of this to one side to provide the £50 million each year—or abandoning the conservation and recreation work, at a considerable political risk.

Viewed rationally, the Forestry Commission should be left alone to continue with what it does best. It has recently undergone considerable reform to increase its profitability, and is continually improving its conservation and recreation roles. The push for privatisation appears, therefore, to come from just two sources: ideological privatisers, and the Treasury. The former are highly placed in the government, but will have a tough time persuading the country, and parliament, that they are right. But the government is desperate for money, and the dash for cash could, ultimately, overrule common sense. Government decisions in the months to come will show who will prevail.

*David Beskine is assistant director (access) of the Ramblers' Association*

## GREEN GAUGE



# As a committed walker, **Vicky Hutchings** has a personal interest in what happens to the Forestry Commission

So where are all the walkers to go? Trying to create long-distance footpaths can be a nightmare, as the Countryside Commission has found out with its plans for Britain's 12th along Hadrian's Wall. This will start at Bowness-on-Solway, west of Carlisle, and stretch across England to the River Tyne as it reaches the North Sea. As Geoffrey Lean commented in the *Observer* last Sunday, this one will be the "most controversial" of all, as the heritage lobby joins all the usual protestors to such schemes. Clearly, it will be some years before it's up and running, if indeed it ever happens.

Now I've tried quite a few official long-distance paths—large chunks of the Pennine Way, the Southern Uplands Way and the Ridgeway—but finished only one: the West Highland Way. And while it is true that it's much easier at the planning stage to follow a path all mapped out for you, there is no doubt that many are overused and overcrowded. The Pennine Way turns into a motorway of mud over some of the Yorkshire moors: in parts, it is so bad that the land is held in place by chickenwire. Even more stress will be put on these official paths if the ability to plan alternative routes is curtailed. And if the privatisation of the Forestry Commission goes ahead, this is surely what will happen.

This May, a friend and I set off from Fort William and walked to Inverness. Initially heading south-east along the West Highland Way to Kinlochlieven, and the comforts of Mamore Lodge—the former hunting lodge of the Bibby family, and now a hotel with a bunkhouse at the side—we soon turned north-east. Using cobbled-together lengths of footpaths across open moorland, farm tracks, Forestry Commission trails and General Wade's old military roads—interspersed with a succession of excellent farmhouse B & Bs, hotels and a ghastly private hostel—we barely encountered proper roads, except when we crossed them, and during the final miles, where Wade road becomes the Old Edinburgh Road, and meanders through estates of modern bungalows and hedgeless lawns into Inverness. (A tip for those who want luxury at the end of this trip: stay in Glendruidh House, the former home of Sir Russell Johnston, the local MP. This boasts a circular dining-room, where even the doors and the glass in the windows are curved.)

It was a grand walk of about 130 miles. Some days we would see no one from early morning until night. On others we might come across a lone walker on The Ultimate Challenge (the Scottish coast-to-coast walk run by Hamish Brown in May), propped up in the grass, or against a tree, rucksack behind his back, usually munching sandwiches. We would always stop for a leisurely word, and swap stories of who we had met and where. Often the names would be recognised as someone the walker had met a few years ago on another such epic trail. It felt like life from another century. But we couldn't have done it if it hadn't been for the 30 or so miles along forest paths, courtesy of the Commission.

But the Forestry Commission doesn't only provide for people like me. In the Lake District, for example, Whinlatter and Grizedale forests have visitor centres, picnic sites, cycle trails, hides from which to watch the wildlife, waymarked forest trails for all abilities and, in Whinlatter, a badger sett. In fact, during the part of our coast-to-coast walk that took us up into Aviemore through Inshriach Forest, we found ourselves walking along a very civilised nature trail indeed.

Last month, the Labour Party launched its campaign against privatising the Forestry Commission. Chris Smith called it "the theft of a vital national asset", and pledged that Labour would "campaign unstintingly in parliament and throughout the country" to prevent it. And as David Beskine points out this week, you would be hard put to find a single environment or countryside body that supports it. The Ramblers' Association itself is running a series of walks on 26 September throughout Britain as part of its campaign.

All around us, councils are battling to keep open existing footpaths, as walkers encounter fences across paths, locked gates, often with barbed wire along the top, and ploughed-up fields where once a footpath used to be. But councils seem loath to prosecute. Neither are they creating many new paths; although, to be fair, the reason is often financial. In 1989, for example, Oxfordshire county council made a compulsory footpath creation order for a one-mile path through Wych Wood, owned by Lord Rotherwick. The council and Lord Rotherwick are still discussing his claim for £1.5 million in compensation four years later, and the matter may yet have to go to the Lands Tribunal for adjudication.

Two years ago, my friend and I tried a route across Scotland that Hamish Brown turned into a bestseller. But after slogging along a 26-mile road walk around Loch Rannoch, and with the prospect of more to come, we gave up—and ambled down by the River Tay into Perth. If Forestry Commission lands are sold off, this may be what the walking of the future will be like. That, or back to the Pennine Way.



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Camcorder heaven: Martin Parr's view of the Bongo Burger Bar at Windsor Safari Park

The photography of Martin Parr pinpoints the humour and horror of consumer culture. **Boyd Tonkin** acclaims a sardonic guide to the way we live now

# Sad hearts at the supermarket

When the grim farce of politics breaks for an intermission, journalists call it the silly season. For everyone else, nothing is so serious as leisure. In the summer of 1935, W H Auden wrote a birthday poem for Christopher Isherwood that opens with a sparkling sketch of "August for the people", when "the sallow oval faces of the city" tumble from coaches by "the undiscriminating sea" to "live their dreams of freedom".

Auden wrote that on the Baltic coast of Germany, two years into the Third Reich; the poem closes, thirties-style, with a reminder that we "all sway forward on the dangerous flood of history, that never sleeps or dies". Those lines returned to me as I digested a new exhibition and book by Martin Parr. *Home and Abroad* is a selection from a decade's work by the documentary photographer whose images of pre-millennium Britain will fix our age for future generations as clearly as Bert Hardy's do for the 1940s or David Bailey's for the 1960s.

With the aid of strident colours and a classical sense of composition, Parr records those spells of "free time" when we paradoxically work hardest at being ourselves. He pictures holidays and day-trips, shopping sprees and garden parties. And unlike other photographers, his unsentimental camera lingers almost lovingly on the garbage all this consumption leaves behind.

The fault-lines of class and place show through all his projects; in fact, Parr's high-profile career has more or less coincided with the Thatcher era and its aftermath. On facing pages in the book of *Home and Abroad* are pictures of two groups of girls. One depicts some Shirley Temple-like tinies competing for the "Miss Rosebud" prize in the grubby Merseyside resort of New Brighton. Watched by a pair of judges with identical rigid copper perms, one girl smooths down her hair against the wind.

In the other photo, a couple of teenage Sloanes at the Badminton horse trials repeat the same gesture. These girls will never meet—they might not even understand one another if they did—and only the small masquerades of femininity can join them.

No one who reads Parr's work through the lenses of a "two nations" analysis will run short of ammunition. As they sip wine at Tory fêtes or sniff the potpourri in chintzy stores, the bourgeoisie on Parr's home ground of Bristol and Bath could almost live on a dif-



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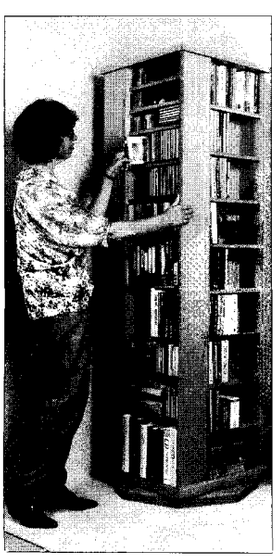

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ferent planet from the wan women at Tupperware or lingerie parties in Salford.

We can't overlook these divisions, but they tell only half of Parr's story. He also wants to make connections, to show what links the tribes not only of Britain, but of Europe as a whole. Recent pictures catch up with tourists and shoppers in Spain, France, Italy and even Russia, where a fur-hatted local in the Moscow McDonald's carries a tray crammed with burgers, fries and shakes. This would almost count as a visual cliché, were it not for the man's grandly lugubrious face: at last, Dostoyevsky bites the Big Mac.

For one quality that all Parr's images share is humour. The poet Randall Jarrell's self-description, "a sad heart at the supermarket", could almost have been invented for Parr, except that his sly comedy always creeps in. You can see him as a photographic Mike Leigh, zooming in on those moments of embarrassment when family rituals or social events start to fray into rows and tears. At a Royal Commonwealth Society party in Bristol, a pukka sahib in his summer suit curls his lips in disgust as an African man sensibly uses his fingers to eat the buffet food. A spruce mum ostentatiously consults her watch at a National Childbirth Trust coffee morning, her disgruntled tot clasped under one arm.

And Parr is not above the belly-laugh. In a Boulogne hypermarket, a blazered Brit guards a trolley stacked with booze and prudently topped with several packs of kitchen towels. At Next in Oxford Street, a couple of nerdy builders in overalls smirk over a lacy basque. Anyone who picked up the latest in-store magazine at Sainsbury's will have seen his bleakly comic studies of boredom: couples in restaurants whose body-language screams for an escape route.

The microscopic eye for social nuance in Mike Leigh's plays and films always prompts debate about whether he laughs with or at his subjects. The same applies to Martin Parr: as with Leigh, he never mocks or sneers, but neither can he entirely prevent the snobbish spectator from seeing a parade of spotty oiks and suburban wallies.

Parr did the stills photography for the book that accompanied Nicholas Barker's *Signs of the Times* series on BBC2 last year. This cornucopia of flounces, frills and ruches was presented as a straight-faced tour of popular taste. But many viewers suspected the series of laughing up its sleeve at the dens of kitsch it filmed—and enjoyed it all the more for that. When *Paris Match* ran a special Brit-bashing issue, the magazine printed some of Parr's more bizarre images as monstrous proof of our vulgarity. Did he mind? More important, did they pay him?

Parr's people also share a fixation with the "second nature" of commodities and advertising, which impedes their efforts to appreciate the original. Show Parr a seashore, and he'll unerringly shoot the grot: the cans, bags and nameless sludge that testify to human recreation. His tourists peek through viewfinders and ignore the landscape outside the frame. Who needs a real giraffe when you can munch a burger next to a painted one? Up the Eiffel Tower, a couple pore over their maps as the "real" view recedes into the haze; beside the sphinx in Egypt, a podgy visitor in a Harley Davidson shirt and hat resolutely turns his back on the monument.

In his introduction to *Home and Abroad*, Ian McEwan waxes moralistic about the "deracinated, de-natured humanity" of Parr's pictures. Parr seems to attract this sort of heavy-handed patronage: the journalist Robert Chesshyre's essay in the *Cost of Living* collection (1989) drips with a yuppie-bashing venom that I honestly can't find matched in the photographs themselves.

The pictures' warmth and wit soften the edge of judgment. After all, it's only another camera that exposes the blind spots in the tourist and consumer gaze. We're all mired in this material world of images and products—prosperous novelists included.

McEwan rightly points out that children scamper and sprawl through Parr's pictures. His is an unusually philoprogenitive Britain, but it's not a land teeming with innocent mites. The kids consume almost as avidly as their parents; indeed, as babies perch on supermarket trollies, they appear as yet another brand of goods.

Buying—especially buying for children—can express love as well as greed, and Parr has an uncanny sense of the emotions invested in things. One of his most memorable New Brighton photographs shows three generations of women clustered around a naked baby boy: an artful Scouse version of some Renaissance "Adoration". With hands stretched out imploringly, they're about to offer the infant, not milk, but a Milky Way.

With the old solidarities weakened, can collective identity mean anything more than a communion of chocolate bars and check-out queues? Parr's exhibition is a short walk from Broadcasting House in Bristol, where, over the decades, the BBC has made many of the classic programmes that helped to explore the post-colonial British experience.

Now the Corporation seems to have lost touch with the sinews of what Antonio Gramsci called "national popular" culture. John Birt spouts managerial jargon that defines us all as customers, pure and simple. Alan Yentob resurrects *This Is Your Life* and stuffs the summer schedules with re-runs of *Dad's Army* and *The Good Life*.

Perhaps's Auntie's troubled generals should pause to reflect on what unites and what divides the people who pay their salaries, in a country where affinities of style and consumption criss-cross the slowly changing map of class. If they want a lesson in social geography and private aspiration, they could do worse than start with Martin Parr's bittersweet imagery. And if Ian McEwan would like to meet a truly deracinated Liverpudlian, he should try the director-general's office.

*"Home and Abroad" continues at the Watershed Centre, Bristol, until 5 September; the book is published by Jonathan Cape at £15. Martin Parr will be giving a slideshow of his work, with a discussion, at the Watershed on 9 September and at the ICA on 11 September*

**Amanda Whittington** tastes the latest US style to sweep middle England

# Swamp fever in suburbia

"When I first heard Cajun music, it knocked me sideways. It was unlike anything I'd ever come across. I thought 'if it's doing this to me, maybe it will do the same to other people'."

Chris Hall has long since given up teaching to import Cajun lock, stock and beer barrel from the Louisiana swamps to urban Britain. A venue, magazine, Radio Two series and the pioneering "R Cajun & The Zydeco Brothers" have all been squeezed from his love for a little-known accordion sound.

"The idea of R Cajun was to play a broad spectrum of Cajun, Zydeco and blues," he explains. With Britain's first authentic Cajun band, "I wanted to appeal to a wide audience and show them it's not all two-steps and waltzes."

The band have become evangelists of a cult that has crept from its home town of Derby to outposts such as the Mean Fiddler. Striking up the bluesy accordion, French lyrics and dynamic beat "seemed to be an opportunity to present a traditional music to people without any preconceptions," explains Hall. "I loved the music but the more I played it, the more I realised its unique power to cut across boundaries. Country fans, blues fans, folk fans and rock fans love it.

"Go to an R Cajun gig and you'll see Hell's Angels, punks, hippies and people from 18 to 80, all having a good time. It breaks down barriers."

Derby's Swamp Club is a joyful knees-up from which fans emerge clad in promotional T-shirts and well-oiled grins. Live Cajun draws a national crowd to cheer on British challengers such as The Buttermountain Boys, and Louisiana imports Steve Riley and The Mamou Playboys. A little like a home-made theme park, the Swamp Club also aims to recreate Cajun sights, smells and tastes. Dance classes are offered in the two-step and waltz, American beer is on tap and JJ's Kitchen serves chicken and sausage gumbo to punters hungry for an authentic taste.

"We're not Cajun people and we're not pretending to be," warns Hall, though. "We're a little like the blues scene in the 1960s. People got into that and some of the activities that went with it, but we don't have alligators in the back garden."

The real Cajuns had a tough ride in Louisiana. Their ancestors left France in the 17th century to settle in an area of Canada then known as Acadia. By 1710, British colonialists had renamed it Nova Scotia and deported 12,000 Acadians for refusing to swear allegi-



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ance and renounce their Catholic faith.

Surviving Acadians found their way to Louisiana by 1765. They struggled to rebuild their society amid the inhospitable swamps and bayous that isolated Cajun people from mainstream America for almost 200 years. Working hard on the land, they would raise their spirits with an eclectic brew of French, Scottish, American-Indian and Caribbean sounds. Come Saturday night, almost a million French-speaking Acadian descendants still dance to the tunes.

"The music is something everybody loves but they take it for granted and don't realise what they have," says Geno Delafose. Led by his father John, his Eunice Playboys play blistering Zydeco in four-hour sesssions from New Orleans to Houston and Tennessee.

"It's not a big thing at home because you get so much of it," says Geno. "The British audiences appreciate it more. It makes them forget about the bad times and let the good times roll."

If escapism drives people to the old-style fiddle and accordion, it's because such a life-affirming beat has petered out of mainstream music. Disco ensnares dancers in club snobbery, grunge is bleak and impenetrable. When even lesser-known chart bands demand a car ride to an arena, it's no wonder that roots music has grown on our doorstep.

Boisterous and spirited, Cajun's heaving rhythm, manic tunes and warm accordion belies the suffering of its past. To British converts, that's a rare talent. Our own musical inheritance can't ever provide its "poor but happy" *joie de vivre*. "Cajuns have been exploited and lead a tough life but music is a release," adds Hall. "As soon as you start playing, people let their worries disappear."

Cajun now tastes so good, it's been sampled by admen. Authentic musicians can now be found whipping up a storm for McCoys Cracker Snacks. The single of the advert is also in the shops. Their version of "Two-Step Farouche" could mean crossover time for the Eunice Playboys. "They saw us at a jazz festival in New Orleans and they really enjoyed our washboard player's performance," explains Geno, heard but not seen in the ad. "It's kind-of split the group, because they took people from other groups and put them together on our song." From the bayou to the high street, cultural colonisation is complete.

The message to recession-hit Brits is clear, yet the Cajun invasion suggests more than a nation burying its head in the swamp. The American poor are at least allowed to dream of a better life. From an ocean away, spiritual wealth in poverty is a romantic ideal that the white folks buy into again and again.

It's a yearning to bridge the gap between uptight hymns and lusty gospel, miserable folk dirges and passionate blues. Contrast Morrissey's suburban depressives with Springsteen's small-town fighters. Such a lust for life was never made in Britain.

Cajun is but the latest tonic for our British malaise. Just as with sensual jazz, emotive C&W and bawdy R&B, Swamp clubbers squeeze the inspiring juice from a fruit our musical climate is too grey to grow.

**When cinema gets in the family way: Tina Kellegher in "The Snapper"**

**Jonathan Romney** looks into the gap between the big and small screens

# Nothing on the telly

A friend and I recently emerged from a screening of Ken Loach's new film *Raining Stones*, which we both felt was an impressive piece of work. "The only trouble," we agreed, "is that really it's a TV film." But neither of us could quite put our finger on what we meant by a "TV film".

As far as I can make out, what we meant was not so much any particular formal convention of TV drama. It wasn't a question of close-ups, or interiors, or a style of lighting, or a particular use of naturalistic acting. In fact, none of these except the last seemed to apply much to the Loach film. What was worrying us, rather, were the circumstances under which we saw it. In time-honoured Loach fashion, the film favours a quasi-documentary style. It makes itself look "artless", all the better to be immediate, to bring home like fresh news some harsh realities of British life. That immediacy seemed at odds with the ritualised, sometimes quasi-sacramental experience associated with cinema-going—no, I'm not being reverential here, but seven quid a throw at your local Odeon counts as quasi-sacramental in my book.

In fact, in a round-table discussion at Cannes this year, Loach suggested, in his best *Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* way, that the only way to save British cinema was to take it into the pubs. Presumably he meant that you could show the latest hot piece of polemical naturalism in the lounge bar, where it would stop all conversation and then be robustly debated come lock-in time. This oddly archaic notion presupposes a Lawrentian pub-community culture that may now exist only through the lens of *Coronation Street* nostalgia.

But Loach may have a point in that certain films seem to demand a fresher air than the fetishising environment of the art-house network. They call for a sort of broadsheet existence: a screening situation that affords a more dynamic contact both with audiences and with the daily culture the films engage with. Really, they demand TV.

Much of my unease with Mike Leigh's cinema work, for example, is to do with the way that its pithy sniping at social "types" comes across in the cinema as bilious disdain because images on the big screen have a way of becoming monolithic (they're literally bigger than life).

Images on the small screen, however, are more fluid, more open to influence by the circumstances in which they're watched and the flow of images that surrounds them—the programmes before and after, what's on the other channels, what was on the night before, not to mention the televisual stereotypes they interact with (how are the characters in a realistic drama like or unlike sitcom figures?). Caught in the stream of a night's viewing, images enjoy a dialogue with each other; on a cinema screen, they stay as they are, and become icons. TV provides the immediacy and disposability of newsprint.

The question of how films look like television is raised this week by Stephen Frears' *The Snapper* (on release from 6 August). This really is an odd case, because *The Snapper* is a television film in the strictest sense. It was made for television and has already been screened as part of BBC2's generally lacklustre, prettifying *Screen Two* season, in which context it came across as welcomely abrasive. It also turned up, rather unexpectedly, in the Directors' Fortnight at Cannes. This week it gets a widespread cinema release, presumably on the grounds that it was too good to squander on TV, where it was apparently destined to remain.

For Frears, *The Snapper* is very much a



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return to cathode-ray roots after the half-hearted flashiness of his Hollywood flop *Accidental Hero*. It's a rather downbeat sequel of sorts to Alan Parker's exuberant *The Commitments*, adapted once again by Roddy Doyle from his own novel (except that, for copyright reasons, the Rabbitte family have been reborn as the Curleys).

I didn't see *The Snapper* on TV, but I suspect I would have liked it rather more than in the cinema. That's partly because of those formal questions of intimacy that the big screen seems unhappy with. The interiors, the close-ups, the raggedly counterpointed dialogue, all place us neatly in a raunchier version of soap opera as the overpopulated confines of a Dublin household are prised open before us.

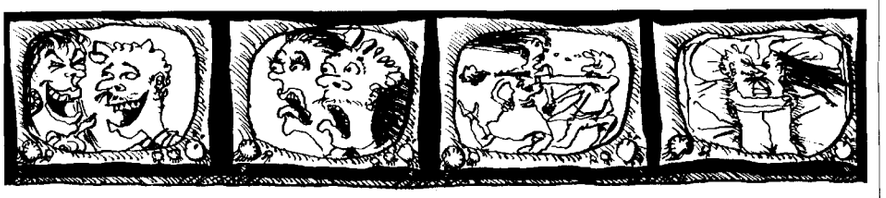
This could unashamedly be called kitchen-sink drama, especially since someone throws up in one. As soon as the film starts, we're immediately around the Curleys' breakfast table with our face in their cornflakes, struggling to remember the names of everyone, twins, dogs and all. We're treated as if we're already old acquaintances, and if we're not, we'll just have to hang around until we learn the ropes. It feels like straying into an unfamiliar soap, except that this effect works to make everything seem more real, more autonomous. But the dialogue with television soap opera that comes in to play here simply loses its focus in the cinema.

What you lose, too, is the mirror effect of sitting in your living room watching TV. This might seem like a *reductio ad absurdum* of the reality effect at work in naturalistic drama: one famous art-programming experiment in the US did indeed consist of extended footage of couch-bound viewers staring out of the screen. (The nearest British equivalent is probably those mysterious "real people" who crop up on the Carlton idents). But television drama has always cultivated the uneasy frisson of voyeurism you get when you "look into" other people's homes, in a way that cinema, by nature, can't. Watching a garish Mike Leigh living room on the cinema screen, you're seeing a parody set at several satiric removes; you see it in a distanced, crueller way. On television, the element of reflection makes the satire less cruel but sharper: literally, closer to home and closer to your living room.

The same applies to *The Snapper*, which is so explicitly an intervention into the domestic sphere that you really want to see it as a classy disruption in the cosy context of Sunday night on BBC2 (most of the *Screen Two* films, with their accent on "quality", simply confirm the cosiness). One of the great things about it is the way it constantly returns to the scene of the sofa, as Curley Senior compulsively channel-hops, lamenting there's "nothing on the telly".

What I missed was the relish that I might have had watching that on telly myself: I missed the idea of talking about it the next day, the "Did Your See?" factor. And that makes me suspect that when we complain about films looking like TV films, we mean that something's missing—not cinema, but TV itself.

## JACI STEPHEN



# Fun, fun, fun? No: repeats, repeats, repeats. God only knows why the summer schedules just do it again

With every channel filling its schedule with repeats, TV critics are reaching desperation point. It always happens around this time of year. You find yourself setting the video to record *The Upper Hand* and *Birds of a Feather*, knowing that when you're really on your uppers you can return to the dire state of British sitcoms.

Alternatively, you can pontificate about the state of television in general. Critics will be eternally grateful to John Birt for having generated drama within the BBC that is on a par with anything on the screen. Likewise, they praise the heavens for sending them John Major, whose breathtakingly bad performances on the box provide endless copy.

Another classic excuse is the "There was nothing on so I hired a video" line. This allows critics to dig out classics such as *Fawlty Towers* and question why nobody makes programmes like that anymore.

When these routes have been exhausted, however, there are always films. There are plenty of them on all channels at present, and they cover a wide range of subjects. This means you can witter on *ad infinitum* about whatever happens to take your fancy.

Subjects such as the dire state of pop music, for instance. If your region hasn't yet caught up with the film *The Story of the Beach Boys: Summer Dreams* (HTV, Saturday), you have a treat in store. Apparently, these late-night films are doing the rounds, and I had the dubious blessing of being in the West Country to catch this gem at the weekend.

Until this moment, I had thought that the story of the Beach Boys and their "surfing sound" could have been written in full on a postage stamp: men in silly shirts and high voices sing monotonous songs and, by some extraordinary quirk of fate (call it an outbreak of insanity), become a success.

But *Summer Dreams* revealed that there was even less to these lads than met the eye. They had the proverbial bad American poppa, who lived through his sons and never came to terms with their need for independent lives. There was the time they all got heavily into drugs (even the terribly nice Brian, who wrote the songs), symbolised here by a bizarre collection of kaftans and inauthentic false beards. And finally, they made a comeback, minus Dennis, the wild one, who drowned.

To me, surfing as a form of thrills rates somewhere between stamp collecting and fly fishing. It's a craze that gives men the chance to show off their bodies and make bets with each other as to how many nmphets they can pull. In *Summer* (wet) *Dreams*, Dennis pulled the greater number. Due to a nifty piece of chainsaw editing, he met one woman, married her and produced a kid in 23 seconds flat. But it didn't matter because they were separated four seconds after that.

Still, the whole thing made me realise that there is at least one positive thing to be said for the Beach Boys: they weren't the Bay City Rollers.

Two other offerings on Saturday night had remarkably similar plots. *Taggart—Violent Delights* (ITV) featured Florence Guerin as a woman who undressed without drawing her bedroom curtains, and *Monsieur Hire* (BBC2) had another French woman doing the same. Both featured a male spying on the female from a distant window, and both acts of voyeurism ended up unwittingly involving the men in a murder story.

You can't help feeling that women who undress in full view of the neighbours really are asking for trouble. And why is it that only slim women who wear stockings and suspenders engage in this strange activity? Heaven forbid it should have anything to do with the fact that men's names invariably appear prominently in the closing credits.

The highlight of this week's film schedule was undoubtedly *The French Connection* (BBC1, Monday), the Oscar-winner starring Gene Hackman and Roy Scheider. With not a stocking in sight, this was a real boys' film, with Hackman, as a New York cop, scoring only once. True, it was with a woman who handcuffed his ankle to the bed, which probably explains why he found it safer to be on the streets fighting the drugs war.

You would need to have looked hard this week to find a decent woman who had more to do in life than serve male fantasies. In film, even when a woman has a successful career, she must fall in love to give her life meaning. Donna Mills in *The World's Oldest Living Bridesmaid* (C4, Tuesday) could not just be a lawyer; she had to fall for her younger male secretary (the male fantasy in reverse).

Again, it was only *Poirot* (ITV, Sunday) that showed us that women can be heartless bitches just as prone to ruthless, murderous tendencies as men. In *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe*, Gerda (Joanna Phillips-Lane) revealed herself to be an impersonator, a liar, married to a bigamist and an accessory to murder. Did she wear stockings? Did she strip in her window? The brilliant Poirot (David Suchet) would have turned away if she had.



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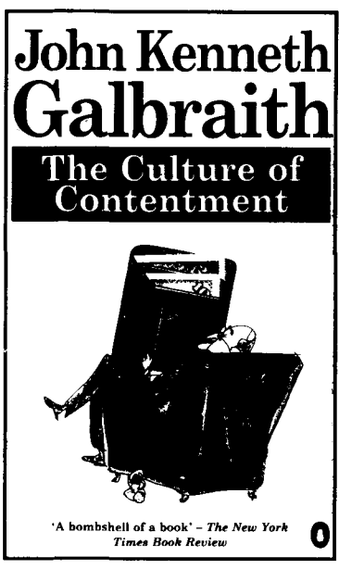


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# Sharing needles

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Secker & Warburg, £8.99
**THESE ENCHANTED WOODS**
**Allan Massie**
Hutchinson, £14.99

*Brian Morton*

Eclectics' eclectics, the Scots are strong on cultural adaptation and on a certain brutal intimacy of address, particularly if it affords the momentary but irresistible high that comes from feeling *defined*. A quarter of the way through Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*, Iggy Pop, having gazed out over a pure mental audience at the Barrowlands in Glasgow, leans forward and bellows an altered lyric: "'America takes drugs in psychic defence'; only he changes 'America' for 'Scatlin' and defines us mair accurately in a single sentence than all the others have ever done."

*Trainspotting* is a tense, urgent chronicle of addiction. It's set not in Glasgow (the Barrowlands gig was an away fixture) but in the twin capitals of the Great British Syzygy: Edinburgh mainly, but also London, cities defined by the distance between the dignified and the insufficient. The novel perches neatly on a stack of scare-sociologies identifying the Festival City as the skag and HIV capital of Britain, a circle of hell reserved for politely spoken needle-sharers.

But what is the nature of the addiction that *Trainspotting* actually documents? What is the precise analysis of "psychic defence"? Denied more robust political and socioeconomic supports, the Scots have always been uniquely dependent on language as an emotional bulwark and a primitive act of self-definition. We bombard reality with an obscenely irradiated stream of words in the hope that reality will magically glow with signification. And that is what Welsh does with his shifting group of users.

Theirs is a kind of Burroughs-like junk language, grossly and intimately performative. It expresses a society-outside-society, but unlike Burroughs' cognitively displaced world, it still somehow insists on a place in the old everyday world of mam and dad, home, school and university. As in Hubert Selby's fiction, it is surprising how often characters' emotional needs hinge on sheer ordinariness and a sentimental urge to transcendence or logical explanation. What seem to be lapses in register, style-switches between phonetic street speech and educated RP learned at college or through the media, represent Welsh's sensitivity to a defining aspect of Scottish sociolinguistics. His awareness of it is needle-sharp.

Needle-sharing, like head-butting and a chib tucked into your socks, are—as the novelist Archie Hind once suggested—symptoms of a simultaneous need for and fear of intimacy. There is another aspect to this. As in all societies governed by restricted codes—gangs, freemasonries, secret intelligence—naming or renaming are centrally important and the Scots are adept at it.

**Another Edinburgh: Robin Philipson's "View from my studio window" (1954), in Duncan Macmillan's magisterial history of "Scottish Art 1460-1990" (Mainstream)**

I spent four years in Edinburgh in the company of Big Swifty, Billy the Mountain, Wombat, Groovy, and three unrelated females known—for reasons too obscene to recount—as the Pointer Sisters. I couldn't now make a fist at any of their real names. In *Trainspotting*, names don't necessarily mean what they seem to: Rent-Boy or Rents is simply Mark Renton; for all his Sean Connery-inspired satyriasis, Sick Boy is miraculously free of the Virus; Second Prize inevitably comes last in a field of two. What the names do, when coupled with their "real" cognates and distributed through a dense collage of first-person narrative, is to create a haze of language in which individual identity begins to blur significantly.

This is the first, improbable point of contact between *Trainspotting* and Allan Massie's *These Enchanted Woods*. Both, though, are examples of a curious literary phenomenon: the condition-of-Scotland novel. A century and a half after Disraeli, Scottish writing is still battling with the idea of two nations.

It's important to register that in Welsh's book, as in Massie's, London represents an important focal point for all the characters, however entrenched their national pride. But, of course, the nations are also divided within themselves. There was in the 1980s a rather tiresome critical ping-pong between those writers, such as Ronald Frame, who began to insist that the dourly violent proletarian strain in Scottish fiction was only a very partial reality, and those who countered that Frame's chintzy and elaborate fictions were an evasion of reality. It was a debate that went back to Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Hugh MacDiarmid, and to Edwin Muir's *Scott and Scotland*, with its liberal modernist dismissal of Walter Scott's sentimental Toryism.

Massie has been attacked in Scotland as a latter-day representative of Scott: hostile to democracy and urbanism, a defensive Unionist committed to High Tory pastorals. However true that might be of his newspaper columns, which reveal an able controversialist, it is far less true of his fiction. If his novels recall anyone from this century, it has to be André Malraux, whose awareness of how characters behave within tightly-knit ideological groups is unparalleled (the title of Massie's 1981 novel *The Death of Men* took its cue direct from Malraux).

Dismissed until *The Death of Men* as a novelist of manners, Massie has emerged as a historical novelist in the truest vein. In *These Enchanted Woods*, young Kenneth Leslie works his way steadily through *Waverley, Guy Mannering* and *The Antiquary*, impressed that their colourless heroes reflect his own situation. Massie makes little explicit play with Scott's multiple namings, carefully stratified backgrounds and relatively empty foregrounds, but these are clearly an element in his own storytelling. This concerns a group of rather *soignés* Scottish aristocrats, an upwardly mobile Ukrainian and an American lady novelist who believes herself to be a reincarnation of Mary Tudor.

So what can possibly link these two, apparently antithetical novels? In the first place, Massie's characters share broadly the same dependencies as Welsh's, bloatering down vast quantities of gin, whisky or claret just to take the edge off hovering anxieties about their "station". Politicians, novelists, local gentry, they are addicted as well to self-definition and sweeping generalisations about Scotland, its politics and culture.

Colin reappears from Massie's 1980 novel *The Last Peacock*, still shaking his tail feathers in a mixture of desperate libido and sheer intellectual display. It is difficult, as in *Trainspotting*, always to be clear who is talking to whom, who is seducing whom in the bushes or down a phoneline. This is not a failure of characterisation, but part of both books' tendency toward a collective voice and choric rather than individual statement.

The main change in Massie's approach over a decade, perhaps signalled by Kenneth's slightly different response to *The Heart of Midlothian*, is in the role of women. In neither *Trainspotting* nor *These Enchanted Woods* are they chivalrically sentimentalised; the American novelist is patently a figure of fun. With smack or whisky numbing your balls,



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women become items of exchangeable value, located squarely in the cash nexus.

Welsh's characters pimp on their girlfriends. Massie's alcoholic landowner, Gavin, impoverished by ineptitude rather than gambling, nervously entertains a long-term indecent proposal for his wife Fiona from her former lover Tony Lubbock, the putatively Jewish incomer who pulls financial and political strings in London. If there is hardly a page in *Trainspotting* that doesn't have "cunt" on it, there are very few without a reference to money, and the proximity is telling. In both novels, it is clear that the primary dependency is an economic one: a profound social and cultural shortfall that can only be bridged by excess. Together, they present a painful, often funny, but also searingly accurate diagnosis of Scotland's needs.

# Little women

**FOXFIRE: CONFESSIONS OF A GIRL-GANG**
**Joyce Carol Oates**
Macmillan, £14.99

*Wendy Brandmark*

Five teenage girls mingle their blood in a candlelight consecration of their gang, Foxfire. "Legs" Sadovsky, boyish, beautiful, strong and fearless, is their adored leader. Maddy, the articulate cautious one, nicknamed "killer" for her cruel wit, records the gang's glorious and tragic adventures. Goldie, big and brutal with a hyena laugh, becomes their First Lieutenant. Giggly Lana, handsome but with a weak eye, is a stalwart soldier. "Fat little hapless" Rita is the school scapegoat until Legs bring her into the gang.

"Different as we were . . . we were like family members proud of their distinctions while always, always confused with one another by outside, neutral observers." They all live in the same drab working-class neighbourhood in upstate New York, all from homes riven by violence, mental illness and poverty. All feel like outsiders, fallen angels who don't belong to "the special creation of God, or of man". The gang becomes their supportive family, its credo—an odd mix of Robin Hood Marxism, radical feminism and teenage bravado—their religion. For a time, when they rent a dilapidated farmhouse, Foxfire even provides a safe haven.

Though they may compete with each other for Legs' affection, they are united in their distrust and dislike of men. At first, Foxfire only punishes those who sexually abuse members of the gang, but later, when they need money to keep up their farmhouse, they begin to "hook" respectable men, to exploit the perversity they condemn.

A middle-aged, middle-class john is lured into a compromising situation with one of the Foxfire girls, discovers that she is underage, and must buy her silence. When this dangerous game does not produce enough money, Legs thinks of a "final solution" that will free them forever from men—but their kidnap of a rich industrialist ends in bloodshed and the gang's destruction.

The Foxfire confessions are as much about fantasy as Legs' dreams of flying. It is not just the gang's wild adventures, but their feminism—their loyalty and love, and intuitive understanding of sexual politics—which seems so surprising, especially when we remember that this novel is set in the 1950s. They may be naive, but they know that even if a teenage girl pretends to be ignorant of her own sexuality, a "little woman" who accepts the patronising treatment of her elders, she can still become the guilty victim, the consenting minor, the knowing innocent who has seduced her abuser.

Joyce Carol Oates has produced powerful fiction about the alienation of the young, but I don't remember anything quite as euphoric as *Foxfire*. The writing is as daring and full of vitality as the gang it describes, and the characters of the girls, especially Legs, boldly drawn. The story is so satisfying, so attractive, because we believe in this passionate sisterhood, these teenage girls who, in a moment as brilliant as the flame they tattoo on their shoulders, emerge from obscurity to inherit the earth.

# Face values

**THE BODY SOCIAL: SYMBOLISM, SELF AND SOCIETY**
**Anthony Synnott**
Routledge, £12.99 paperback/£40 hardback

*Steve Beard*

In 1956, Horace Miner published his mock-anthropological essay, "Body Ritual among the Nacirema". He described some of the quaint folk customs of the Nacirema, a "magic-ridden" tribe who lived south of the Canadian Cree. Using the time-honoured satirical devices of inversion and estrangement, he reported on the funny business of male self-laceration rituals, female head-baking practices and ceremonial visits to "latipso"—all presumably taking place in some suburban tract-land through the looking-glass. As he wrote: "There are ritual fasts to make fat people thin and ceremonial feasts to make thin people fat. Still other rites are used to make women's breasts larger if they are small, and smaller if they are large."

Miner was picking up on the work of pioneering American anthropologists such as Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, who had been busy researching tribal customs in the South Pacific and Japan during the 1940s. He was bringing it all back home. The implication that a host of North American cultural practices—from cosmetic surgery to hairdressing—were just as intimately concerned as any tribal ritual with the social construction of the body is not one that has been lost on later anthropologists and sociologists. In fact, they have taken it all too seriously.

In his comprehensive survey of the theoretical literature, Anthony Synnott shows just how much scholarly attention has been devoted to the body over the past 30 years. There is not just Mary Douglas' groundbreaking work on how the body tends to double as a natural symbol of society, but also Foucault's infamous elaboration of the way state power is organised in and through bodies, a wealth of post-Freudian research on psychosomatic therapy and a huge pile of opinions and insults generated around the divisive gender debates of recent years.

Synnott calmly plots a course through this material, pruning its excesses, highlighting its essentials and placing it all in the widest context possible. He goes right back to the founding myths of Graeco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian culture in order to ground his footnotes to Foucault.

*The Body Social* comes up with few ideas of its own. Whereas Bryan Turner's *The Body and Society*, published nine years ago, attempted to synthesise Malthus, Rousseau, Weber and Goffman into a grand unified theory of the body-in-society, Synnott is content to remain an archivist, picking his way through the thickets of past scholarship. It was particularly inspired of him to seize on the theme of the human senses as a leitmotif—he concentrates on the faculties of sight, smell and touch—for this helps him to make a map out of a potential maze.

Some of the most interesting material in the book consists of fragments culled from diverse sources. Not only is there Hume on the restorative power of matter over mind; there is Sartre on the menace of the imaginary gaze, Marx on the sensory deprivation of the proletariat and McLuhan on the externalisation of human sense organs in the media.

Synnott is least impressive where he tries to be most original. His two most obviously sociological chapters, on facial beauty and hair-care, lead him into facile generalisation and a consistent avoidance of the complexities of popular culture. While discoursing on the perils of what he calls "beautism" and "aesthetic discrimination", he mentions beauty pageants, the Joker in *Batman* and the grotesque villains in *Dick Tracy* as pop-cult illustrations of his absurdly obvious theory—and that's it.

There's nothing very much on the more ambivalent personae of Prince or Michael Jackson; nothing on the post-Aids connotations of thinness; nothing on new social complaints such as male anorexia; nothing on the post-1960s reversal of male headdress codes (long hair is macho, cropped hair gay); nothing on anything much beyond the 1970s.

Maybe this is down to Synnott's failure to research popular culture properly. The refusal to deal with Bakhtin's Rabelaisian theory of the body places a serious dent in his theory of "beautism". That the damaged, the deformed and the plug ugly might have their own quite separate canons of taste is something Synnott does not seriously consider. Maybe he needs to go back and read his Horace Miner.



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# Scripture to showbiz

**THEATRE AND THE WORLD: PERFORMANCE AND THE POLITICS OF CULTURE**
**Rustom Bharucha**
Routledge, £12.99 paperback/£35 hardback

*Betty Caplan*

This is a timely and necessary book. In it, the Indian writer, director and dramaturge Rustom Bharucha makes the journey from west to east, coming home to his own sense of history, tradition and value. Having been a professor in New York—*sine qua non* of a self-respecting theatre worker these days—he begins by smashing a number of treasured idols: Edward Gordon Craig, Artaud, Grotowski, Richard Schechner and, horror of horrors, Peter Brook, now spoken of as author of the *Mahabharata*. "Peter Brook's *Mahabharata*," people say, referring to the epic's definitive version, the one that won the west.

One of this book's most provocative and challenging aspects is its ability to confront the question of who owns a cultural artefact. Michael Billington took issue with Bharucha in the *Guardian*, asking: "Does the *Mahabharata* belong exclusively to India any more than Shakespeare belongs exclusively to Britain or the *Divinia Commedia* to Italy?" Alas, there is a fatal flaw in this argument. The works he is referring to from the west have been written by two individual men; speaking, no doubt, for their fellows as few have before or since, but nevertheless two historical people.

The *Mahabharata* is the result of no such private authorship. It is a work of spiritual as well as artistic magnitude. Thus a truer analogy would have been with the New Testament, or with elements of the Catholic Mass being sliced up and served at a banquet for a public hungry for exotic entertainment. Not that one can readily imagine being shocked by such an event; we have become essentially unshockable.

In the best chapter, Bharucha systematically makes his case against Brook's adaptation. He argues that it is reductive, simplistic and false to the original both in style and content. That the performances by a gathering of international actors blended the thing into a homogenised non-entity in which differences of culture and background were erased. That the one and only Indian performer—Mallika Sarabhai—was prevented from expressing her own voice.

Most crucially, perhaps, Bharucha brings his sharp awareness of the circumstances in which the piece was made to bear on the final product. Not only does he point out that the Brook tour in India cost more than the state's annual cultural budget; worse, Indians were unable to see the piece because of the prohibitive cost. Thus a special filmed version was made for their consumption. If this isn't economic appropriation, I don't know what is.

**Kathakali actors making up before a performance of the "Mahabharata" in Kerala, 1950. "Henri Cartier-Bresson in India" (Thames & Hudson, £14.95) includes many of the great photographer's most powerful and memorable images**

He argues illuminatingly, without rancour. And his conclusions are pointed: greater vigilance is necessary if former colonial nations are to uphold their own self-respect. "Cultural appropriations, after all, are made not through coercion but complicity."

The second and third parts of the book present models of what he deems to be good practice. The "Request Concert Project"—a tour of Franz Xavier Kroetz's wordless play about a German woman who decides to end her desperate mechanised existence by committing suicide—was invented not to promote cultural tourism, but to create individual productions of Kroetz's play rooted in the indigenous cultural context of Asian cities.

It makes compelling reading, as Bharucha describes the differences in interpretation between the Calcutta, Bombay and Madras productions. But the exact point of the project becomes less and less evident as the various versions retain diminishing links with the German original.

What is even more noticeable is that the fine critical intelligence of the early chapters is entirely missing. Bharucha's eulogistic view of the dancer Chandralekha, who performed in Madras, is simply embarrassing. However, the flaws in the book do not detract from its valuable contribution to an important cultural debate. It should be compulsory reading for students of theatre and cultural studies.

# Play power

**THE RED FEZ: ART AND SPIRIT POSSESSION IN AFRICA**
**Fritz Kramer (translated by Malcolm R Green)**
Verso, £18.95

*Adam Kuper*

Doing fieldwork in a remote Kalahari village 30 years ago, I found myself among a people who were dominated by a distant British colonial regime, despised by the Tswana peoples in the east of their country, and who themselves exercised a contemptuous hegemony over poor Bushman peoples. But if their political situation was based on ethnic division and hierarchy, their rituals were a model of broad-minded internationalism.

During the terrible drought that I lived through with them, they prayed in churches to the Christian God and also appealed to their ancestors. They launched witch-hunts against the enemies within, and invited Bushmen shamans to dance for rain. Sub-Saharan Africa was penetrated only recently by totalitarian monotheistic religions. The tendency is to be pragmatic and eclectic in one's approach to the supernatural, just as most people pragmatically choose the tools with which to work upon the natural world.

Fritz Kramer, a German professor of art theory, has seized on this African syncretism, in particular its expression in sculpture, masks, dance and ritual. Well-read in social anthropology, he draws fruitfully on some classic ethnographies. However, Kramer is also a classic European intellectual: his goal is to identify a single pattern behind all the various forms of African syncretism and to find a single explanation for them all. A pragmatic, African, bits-and-pieces approach might have served him rather better.

Kramer's thesis is that African arts and rituals are all about spirits, and that spirits are commonly identified with human outsiders. These may be shamans who are possessed by spirits, Africans of other ethnic groups, or even Europeans. He then develops a rather old-fashioned distinction between two broad types of African society: the egalitarian, culturally homogeneous tribes, and the hierarchical, ethnically diverse states.

The rituals and arts of the Ashanti and other "state" peoples often attribute magical powers to the despised tribal peoples on their periphery—and, Kramer suggests, in a similar way to the Europeans. The tribal peoples attribute magical potency to strangers within: the mother's ancestors, for instance, among the patrilineal Tallensi of North Ghana, or the possessed person, wearing a mask of a spirit, among peoples of the Congo forests.

However, the real context of 20th-century African art and religion is not the tribe or the pre-colonial state, but the political systems established by European colonial powers and inherited by African élites in the past generation. Art and ritual are reflections on a much more complex—and less exotic—political



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scene than Kramer allows. He really should have given greater emphasis to modern ethnographies that describe, for example, the use of shrines during the war against the Smith regime in Rhodesia or the dances that mock the Mercedes-driving ruling classes today.

Moreover, African religions are not all about spirit possession and African arts are not always religious. There are superb modern studies of contemporary African music and dance that should have pushed Professor Kramer into a more realistic, up-to-date understanding.

In Johannesburg today, corps of dancers include "policemen" who mimic the South African police, drive off spectators who encroach on the dance and "arrest" and "fine" people who can be expected to contribute to the dancer's kitty. This has nothing to do with ideas about magic or spirits.

To ask, as Kramer does somewhat plaintively in similar contexts, whether this is an act of submission or resistance is to miss the complex ways in which dramatic convention works. African arts are more variable, more subtle, and often more secular and disenchanted than Kramer allows.

The book has wonderful photographs. These give a much better impression than does the text of the richly various ways in which Africans represent a world that includes all sorts, whom they know very well.

*Adam Kuper is professor of anthropology at Brunel University*

*Story collections*

# Short rations

*Laurence O'Toole*

In America, careers are not only launched but made on the back of short stories. From Sherwood Anderson through John Cheever, Donald Barthelme and onwards, a hardback edition of shorts is not equivalent to a publisher's suicide note. Here we do things differently. Publishing has big problems with hardbacks and in flogging shorter fiction. For example, a year or so back, a major London publishing house issued a hardback collection by a new writer (both shall remain anonymous). The print run was 1,300, but the final sales didn't reach 100.

There has to be a better way. The paperback original, mid-priced and artfully designed, emerges as a possible solution. The right author with a decent splash of press can hope to sell out an initial run of 2,000 at £8.99 a shot. Now, more rookies can get a first spin around the block with less risk for the publisher. But for the general reader, £8.99 is still not cheap. So do these newly hatched authors deliver, do they write short stories like their American cousins?

**Bridget O'Connor** (*Here Comes John*, Jonathan Cape, £8.99) arrives bright-eyed and super-eager to impress. Her urban tales of nuts and scams, boys and girls, grit and chutzpah, fizz a lot but fizzle out quickly. A busker steals another busker's angelic harp; a girl snogs for all she's worth before her rotten teeth fall out; a best man drowns the groom's dog. What are intended as sharp vignettes only amount to spiky doodles, occasionally charming but mainly weightless. The idea, I guess, is that we revel in the way O'Connor tells 'em, but her wayward locutions and awkward rhythms clog the flow. Next time, if she can ease up a little on the style, she might write something special.

Take a young chap like **Colm O'Gaora** (*Giving Ground*, Jonathan Cape, £8.99) and you might expect him to be striving hard to get free of Ireland, with all that overstatement and self-absorption. But instead he writes very Irish: plenty of glimmering adjectives, plenty of dolefulness too. The stories in *Giving Ground* are about absence and regret, bereavement and mourning, and at their best can be strikingly poignant. However, there are too many deaths in these tales, which have a higher body count than a serial killer's memoirs. By the second or third departure, the emotional returns diminish.

The characters in **Dilys Rose**'s stories do not have the habit of dying (*Red Tides*, Secker & Warburg, £8.99). Rather than tell of things tumultuous and lyrical, she tells of all things small and grey. A stressed mother oversleeps, a singer with a sore throat buys a Fisherman's Friend! Rose closes in on everyday objects, from a cheap shoe to a carpet, but her version of the realistic comes minus the fantastic. There's no drama, nothing happens; not even shit happens. And the reader cries out for something extraordinary to hurry into view.

The extraordinary is **Barbara Gowdy**'s story-clay: from a man with two heads to a woman with two vaginas (*We so seldom look on love*, Flamingo, £5.99). In the title piece, a young mortician confesses to a history of peculiar erotic fantasies: "I was incapable of falling in love with a man who wasn't dead." Climbing on top of fresh male corpses, she pushes their chests hard and waits for the blood to disgorge from their mouths. As a tour round the outer reaches of *amour fou*, this tale is shocking, funny and beautiful.

There are so many good things to say about this writer from Canada, with her unencumbered prose, her density of ideas, her joyous weirdness. Like David Lynch, Gowdy has a thing for oddballs and freaks. But her gaze is thoroughly different, not of pastiche, or of pointlessness, but sympathetic and rehabilitative. It moves the abnormal in from the fringes and towards the commonplace.

People reinvent themselves in Gowdy's strange fictions. It's a very New World thing to do. Here, in old and fettered Britain, the possibility for change is small. It means we don't know which way to look for inspiration—and it is inspiration that Rose, O'Gaora, and O'Connor possess in only short rations. At least someone had the wit to issue Barbara Gowdy, going for a song at £5.99 and proving the short story is still full of juice and that the paperback original can be a great thing indeed.

# Unveiled

**THE FORGOTTEN QUEENS OF ISLAM**
**Fatima Mernissi**
Polity Press, £25

*Carla Power*

Islam's treatment of women is an easy target for western outrage. Rather like Messrs Bush and Clinton before they bombed Baghdad, we can convince ourselves we have the tools and the clarity of vision to condemn. More resonant than critiques from a western viewpoint, however, are the writings of the Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi.

Mernissi trained at Koranic schools as well as western universities, and her work draws on traditional Islamic sources and methodology to come to feminist conclusions. She argues less for a break with Islamic tradition than for an uncovering of it. In *Women and Islam*, Mernissi used key religious texts to show that the Islam of the Prophet's day endorsed women's rights. In her latest book, she turns to Muslim histories to refute the contention that women have never played a political role in Islam.

After Benazir Bhutto won Pakistan's 1988 election, members of the opposition party, citing Islamic law, claimed a woman ruler of a Muslim state was both unprecedented and unnatural. Mernissi uncovers a number of such "unnatural" occurrences. There were women rulers in Yemen as early as the 11th century, while slaves taken as concubines and wives had exercised considerable, if unofficial, political power since the 8th century.

Harem life was essentially a meritocracy, where slaves used beauty and intelligence to gain influence. Though most wielded power indirectly, as mothers or wives of caliphs, there were exceptions. When al-Hakam, an Ummayad caliph of Spain, grew more interested in scholarship than government, his wife, a Christian slave, assumed the management of the Empire.

Mernissi provides evidence of 17 queens who, in minting their own coins and having the Friday prayers read in their names, fulfilled the traditional conditions for Muslim sovereignty. With the exception of two Yemeni queens, women rulers were drawn from non-Arab Muslim cultures: the Turks, the Mongols and the islanders of the Maldives and Indonesia.

Most achieved power by marrying it, though a few, like Mamluk Sultana Radiyya, were designated as successors. Radiyya ruled in Delhi in the mid-13th century, her father Iltutmish having chosen her as sovereign over his less talented sons. After killing off a rival brother, she ruled, unveiled and unchallenged, for four years. Contemporary sources recall this "Pillar of Women, Queen of the Times" as a keen warrior and administrator who "walked in the suqs dressed like a man, and sat among us to listen to our complaints".

*The Forgotten Queens of Islam* is not merely a well-researched investigation of the



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past, but a manifesto for the Islamic world in the 1990s. Mernissi shares with Muslim fundamentalists the quest for an "active past", viewing early Islamic history as crucial to give meaning to the present.

The queens of Islam, she asserts, have been largely ignored or man-handled by a misogynist tradition of scholarship. Mernissi sees Islam and history as the "most dogmatic and efficacious weapons" on the political stage. The Muslim woman, she writes, "must go directly to those books of Muslim history which reactionary forces use against us to block our rights".

In an effort to get Islamic history reread, Mernissi aims to make it accessible. Her descriptions of a chaotic Cairo under the mad Caliph Al-Hakim read like first-rate reportage. As affairs of the heart had great bearing on affairs of state, she includes details of royal relationships. At times, her own tone is downright coquettish: "Did [Muslim queens] fall in love like you and me, foolishly, pathetically, or did they have hearts of stone, unfeeling and cold?"

Yet the flashes of irony, period details and gossipy insights do not extend to the core of Mernissi's book, which is a tersely eloquent discussion of the nature of power in Islam. Mernissi is too complex a thinker to try to cram Islam into the western democratic mould. There is, she holds, an "aristocratic essence" at the heart of political Islam.

The book closes with a discussion of the incompatibility of democracy, based on a multiplicity of voices and truths, and the "caliphal" system, where a caliph rules according to Heaven's law over a submissive populace. Though the caliphate is effectively defunct, the Muslim of the modern nation-state remains torn between the roles of believer and citizen, condemned to "waltz between two irreconcilable scenes". Muslim writers such as Fatima Mernissi suggest that there is some hope for reconciliation.

# Plain man's bluff

**ENGLAND, THIS ENGLAND**
**J G Ramsay**
Sinclair-Stevenson, £16.99

*Colin Ward*

J G Ramsay has a subtitle, "in the steps of J B Priestley", that harks back to that author's journey round England 60 years ago. He could just as well have tacked on the steps of Orwell, a few years later, or of Cobbett in the early 19th-century and Defoe in the early 18th.

There is, in other words, a formula. Bluff, plain-spoken commentator takes a trip around cities, towns and villages to feel the pulse of England, with plenty of telling topographical detail. He provides pen-portraits of key individuals and chance fellow-travellers, meticulously decribes the hotels, boarding houses or friends' homes he stays at, and throws in plenty of general comment on the state of the nation. Sententious generalisations are part of the act: if you want facts, go to the unread statistical sociologists.

Our enjoyment depends on our degree of sympathy with the stance of the author and the quality of the writing. Ramsay agrees and is over the top in praise of his precursors. For him, Priestley's *English Journey* is still "one of the best combinations of polemic and literature to have been written," while Orwell "is probably the only English writer who has ever mattered".

Poor Ramsay doesn't approach their impossible pinnacles. It is one thing to tell us that Norwich has a growing reputation, but quite another to repeat the observation seven times in 12 pages. As to the political stance, can we readers really trust an author who takes seriously the appalling self-parodist, Peregrine Worsthorne?

But I stayed loyally with him for excellent descriptions of contemporary Blackburn, Burnley, Bradford, Tyneside, Stoke, Birmingham, Basingstoke and Brighton. He even has an accurate account of my smug local village. Like Priestley or Defoe, he reveres the fulfillment people get from actually *making* something, as much in his praise for the Staffordshire potteries that still survive as for the remaining mills in the Yorkshire textile industry and the fragment of specialised steelmaking still to be found in Sheffield.

He would rather see people up and doing than doing-up what the bulldozers left behind to make an industrial heritage site for the tourist trade or a sideshow in the shopping mall.

What cheered him up in Newcastle was the spotless Tyne and Wear Metro, and what brightened Manchester was its new tramway Metrolink. Rightly. Ramsay is horrified at the ease with which government and the managers of capital and finance condemned whole industries to death, with no thought for local populations whose labour built that capital—which is instantly reinvested in places where the poor come cheaper or in automated production that displaces yet more labour. He is as terrified as the rest of us with the result: neglected urban backlands dominated by feral youth, unemployed and unemployable, whose predatory culture (history's revenge on the culture of contentment) is built around car theft and drugs.

But his final rant is reserved for what he sees as the British left, which consists of "wealthy, chattering socialists and squashy-minded liberals". He wants to knock our silly heads together for "squealing for a peaceful solution" to the Gulf war. There should have been a picture on the jacket so I'd know who not to share a breakfast-table with at the Grand Hotel in Colmore Row, Birmingham.

*Colin Ward's latest book is "New Town, Home Town" (published by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation)*

## PRINTOUT

# Battle weary

*Boyd Tonkin*

**With a few bold exceptions, informed opinion in the west has underwritten government apathy over Bosnia. When Susan Sontag arrived in Sarajevo to direct "Waiting for Godot", her quixotic mission stood out for its rarity. During the Spanish Civil War, scores of intellectuals made such gestures. Yes, we know that they were often vain, muddled dupes of the Comintern. There are still occasions when a day's naive idealism looks smarter than a lifetime's worldly wisdom.**

**One of the sources of our "compassion fatigue" is the historical distance that divides Britons from a comparable mass trauma. The second world war may have wrecked our economy, but it strengthened the social fabric: with the prospect of victory over manifest evil abroad came the promise of justice at home. We have to return to the four-year massacre that began on 4 August 1914 to find a national cataclysm to match the agony of former Yugoslavia, where every family suffers in a cause that blurs and fades with each month of pointless slaughter.**

**The Great War has almost passed beyond first-hand memory, but print culture helps keep its pain alive. Two of next month's literary novels will reflect aspects of the conflict: Pat Barker's "The Eye of the Door" and Sebastian Faulks' "Birdsong". And a pair of this summer's historical blockbusters take their cues from the war and its long aftermath. Both ratify the belief that 1914 brought another Fall: "Never such innocence again", as Philip Larkin's "MCMXIV" puts it.**

**The Fall means knowledge as well as grief, of course, and Kate Saunders' "Night Shall Overtake Us" (Century, £9.99) traces the changing lives of four young women as the death of men opens doors of opportunity. This is a sometimes corny but highly effective slice of costumed narrative by a sophisticated writer who handles her set-pieces with aplomb, from the force-fed suffragette in Holloway to the machine-gunned officer in Flanders.**

**Saunders' militant heroine remembers that "the whole country had grown old and sad" after the genocide on the Somme. Philippa Gregory's "Fallen Skies" (HarperCollins, £14.99) plucks its title from Lawrence's "Lady Chatterley" preface, with its glimpse of a postwar "tragic age". The novel charts the collapse of a "morose and difficult" ex-officer while his wife fights to keep their child safe from his rage. It dwells not on the mud and gore of the trenches, but on the broken spirits of survivors. As in Saunders' yarn, it's not just men in their millions that have died, but the principle of male dominion itself. Women inherit the ravaged earth.**

**Both of these sturdy sagas count the cost of total war for combatants and civilians. But it seems the compassion they elicit is not for export now. Will our rites of remembrance ever turn into acts of solidarity?**



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**Oh, what can ail thee, Knight at arms**

**Alone and palely loitering;**

**The sedge is wither'd from the lake,**

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# ENDGAMES: Weekend Competition

## GRYPH'S QUIZ

**The answers all have something in common**

1. Outlaw
2. Macrobiotic staple
3. Phiz
4. Joe Louis
5. Bandage for Jack
6. Lignite
7. SA
8. Peanut
9. Abolitionist
10. South-western prominence

**Answers below**

**No 3288 Set by Margaret Rogers**
Verses that include Prince Charles' favourite phrase: "Donde está el lavabo?"

**Report by Ms de Meaner**
This is the sort of comp that produces a BUMPER postbag, which, to my chagrin, I always remember *after* deciding to set this sort of comp. So, as usual, full marks for enthusiasm. But rather fewer for imagination and soaring talent. At the other end of the scale, Basil Ransome-Davies had clearly left his mind running on some kind of weird autopilot:

*. . . They tell me I'm running a fever.*
*I feel like I'm running for office.*
*My ex-wife resides in Geneva:*
*She's partial to Everton toffees.*
*The birds in the sky swim like castles.*
*Cliff Richard's become their Messiah* . . . and so on.

I've been fairly lenient about the scansion of the Spanish, where, strictly speaking, the stress should be on the second syllables of both *está* and *lavabo*. Oh, and many apologies to Watson Weeks for losing the "ks" off his name last week. Lavatorial humour just took off a bit early.

**No 3291 Set by Tim Hopkins**
Can we have some patronising reviews— the sort that implies the reviewer could have written it better—for *Hamlet*, *War and Peace*, or any other "classic". Max 200 words. In by 19 August.

**Quiz answers**

*All involve "brown(e)": 1) William Brown; 2) Brown rice; 3) Hablot Knight Browne; 4) Brown bomber; 5) Brown paper; 6) Brown coal; 7) Brownshirts; 8) Charlie Brown; 9) John Brown; 10) Brown Willy*

When on one's duties far away
One likes to meet one's hosts halfway.
A phrase in French, a word in Dutch—
It all adds to the common touch,
And if one's asking for the loo,
It shows that one is human, too.
Besides, if mime is used instead,
It can be misinterpreted.
Down under, what one says is this:
"Look, sport, one needs a Johnny Bliss."
In Spain, one says, as you must know,
"Donde está el lavabo?"
Americans will dote upon
One, if one raps out, "Where's the john?"
At home, of course, one has one's own;
One simply calls it "Eccles' throne".

**Noel Petty**

*Donde está el lavabo?*
*Où est le pissoir, et vite!*
Phrases that all of us have to know
Once our new treaty's complete.
We'll spend an Ecu all over,
Widdle in Continental loos,
Passing the water past Dover,
Praising our mate, M. Poos.
Urine in Turin, Tirana,
A quick micturition in Mainz:
*In corpore* Men's will be *sana*,
And Women's. Look out for the signs.
Surely you're bursting to join in!
*Excusez!* I'm sure that's the word.
Can't wait to put my new coin in
For a commonly marketed turd.

**Bill Greenwell**

We responded to the advert:
"Cottage in remote retreat,
Lovely beach within a stone's throw,
Private mooring, all complete."
Next, the agent was persuasive,
Sure he'd found a willing buyer,
Showed the views in all directions
Which we could not but admire.
In the cool and dim interior
Careful gestures with his arm
Pointed all its rustic virtues,
Rooms with character and charm.
Bedroom, kitchen, all seemed perfect.
Then we asked where we could pee:
"Donde está el lavabo?"
He just pointed to the sea.

**Alanna Blake**

I'm feeling indisposed, although
I do enjoy the food in Spain.
I've no intention to complain,
But very soon I'll have to go:
*Donde está el lavabo?*

My hosts put on a lovely show,
And I would gladly come again,
But now I have this gnawing pain
And urgently require to know:
*Donde está el lavabo?*

I left the room some time ago
But got lost in the souterrain,
And I've found no one to explain
Where I can check my overflow.
*Donde está el lavabo?*

**John Marriott**



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**Salamanca 198 "Through the Keyhole"**
Through the keyhole, we are given a glimpse of the contents of a residence some of which hopefully furnish clues enabling us to identify the occupants. Unclued answers are the relevant clues (two should really be paired, although one alternative in one is just as acceptable). Solvers should include the address with their entries.

Copies of the Collins Concise English Dictionary for the first three correct entries opened. Entries to Salamanca 198, New Statesman & Society, Foundation House, Perseverance Works, 38 Kingsland Road, London E2 8DQ, by Monday 16 August 1993.

**ACROSS**

10 A small hole for all to see in spinning satellite (6)
13 Awaken in the mind right in the night (5)
14 A grunt from surly porker heard initially (6)
16 Affectionate feelings that are violent when returned in ways (7)
18 A small bolt on Jock's window is fitted with a shaft handle (4)
21 Apt men's dress for Mark? (7)
26 A venomous snake can get studied when not coiled up? (7)
28 As money in a heap mostly (7)
29 An old ladder–it's found round rear of house (4)
37 Awful emanation–mostly a m-mist that's swirling (5)
38 Clamour with energy breaking quiet after last encore (6)
39 Changing environs so, removing miscreant sons (to their own country) (6)

**DOWN**

3 Cave-dweller, extremely short, will walk this way? (4)
4 Cypriot secret society certainly using canal for cover (4)
5 Cursed by nightmares, can't be rid of oceanic bird (6)
6 Colt may be one eventually: better than Mister Ed in short? (4)
7 Contradicts those who tell yarns without hesitation? (8)
8 Cave-dwellers, blind as moles perhaps, though not English (4)
17 Children owned some a moment ago (4)
19 Confections with cold content that is, and square (4)
20 Diffusely bleuatre, this eagle? (8)
22 Duelling position – careless step and I'm touched by point of épée (7)
23 Dropping one from a resort, provide criminal support (4)
25 Disused wharf where food from abroad's taken east (4)
27 Discolours lowest clear working part of eye (6)
30 Deer, etc–afoot? (4)
31 Described by lake environment, this tree? (4)
32 Dismantles eg gun emplacements, removing contents (so only shell remains) (4)
34 Dutch one's yellow–blinking small once (4)
35 Dad's victory dance, one out in the US street? (4)

**Prizewinners for Salamanca 196** (solution below)
J W Leonard, Sutton Courtenay, Oxon
J Grimshaw, London SW18
D Frances Milne, Shepton Mallet, Somerset

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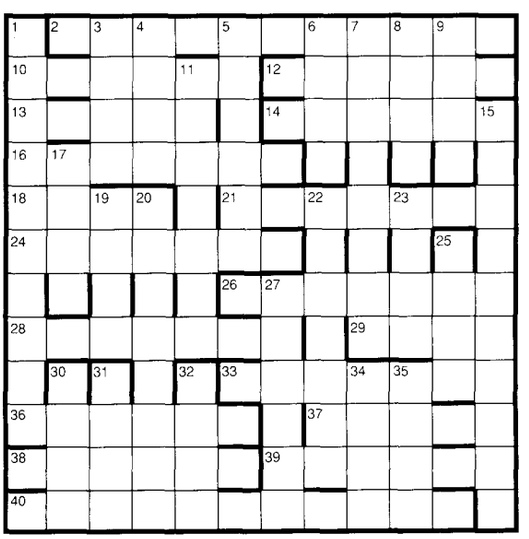

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## BACKCHAT

# What is Ulster Unionism, asks **Mat Coward**, except a nematode worm

Just what the holy bollocks is an Ulster Unionist, anyway, that's what I'd like to know.

I always thought—if I ever thought about it at all, that is, which as it happens I didn't, having better things to do, like cutting my toenails—that an Ulster Unionist was a biscuit, one of those flaky ones, heavy as concrete, though prone to crumbling at the edges. The sort of biscuit that nobody would eat from choice, and is just put into Xmas selection tins to make up the weight. The sort of biscuit that mad old ladies insist on buying, and then can't eat because they'd forgotten that they'd forgotten to put their teeth in.

But I suppose that can't be right, because surely even a government headed by Major is unlikely to rely on the votes of a bunch of biscuits to keep it in office. Though, come to think of it, when I look at some of my neighbours . . .

Is an Ulster Unionist, then, a fat pig? By which I mean, a special breed of porker, genetically altered to provide extra crackling when roasted? Certainly, it seems to me that I have heard talk lately of pork barrels having their bottoms scraped, and of bacon being brought home.

Might not be pigs, of course; might be sheep. Or cattle. Or even potatoes, similar to the Arran Banner or the Great Scot, but less reliable as regards blight and common scab.

Or perhaps Ulster Unionism is, in fact, a species of nematode, used against greenhouse pests. "I say, John, your tomatoes is looking good—majority of 'em, any road." "Arr, well, that's because I sprays 'em regular with that there newfangled Ulster Unionism stuff. That and a good lot of chicken-shit." I'm not sure I go for the idea of being ruled by nematodes. Although, I suppose, anything would seem like an improvement these days.

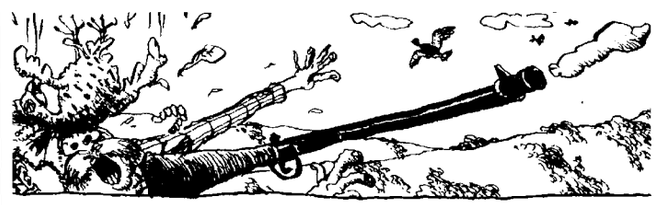
Tell you what, though, I do hope poor John has got hold of the right kind of Ulster Unionist. Because, you see, as I understand it, they are available in more than one flavour, of which only one can be rightfully called the Official Ulster Unionist. Don't know just what the difference is—something to do with where they're grown, maybe—but it'd be a right rum do if poor John has inadvertently formed a coalition with the unofficial ones.

"Wait a minute," Her Majesty might say to him, one day soon, when his wrong sort of Ulster Unionists are all that stands between him and a dissolution. "Just a sec"—putting on her pince-nez, and squinting at the label—"Hold on a mo': these don't look like Official Ulster Unionists to me."

"Er, no?" stammers poor John, loosening his formal collar to let the sweat run down. "No, indeed," says the Queen. "I'm afraid someone's sold you a pup. What you've got here are, unless I'm very much mistaken, which, as you know, is constitutionally impossible, ersatz Ulster Unionists. And they, my dear fellow, are of about as much use in securing a Commons majority as you are at running the country. Tell you what we'll do, though, just to be fair, we'll get my eldest in to give them the once-over. He grows a lot of obscure vegetables, he'll be able to say for certain. Course, he'll most likely have to slice them up to be sure."

And then what will poor John do? Do what he usually does, I suppose, and depend on the LibDems. Whatever the holy bollocks *they* are.

## FORTEANA



Felix Bennett

# **Paul Sieveking** on the Germans who live as Iroquois, Cree and Navaho for a hobby

While this country has the "teepee people" and New Age gypsies, Germany has its "Indian tribes", a continuation of the 1920s back-to-nature movement given added impetus by the reaction against the newly united country's stifling materialism.

An estimated 85,000 Germans are members of these tribes, which include the Iroquois and Seneca of Potsdam, Leipzig's Cree, the Dakota of Meissen and the Navajo of Dresden. Some of the founders of the movement mutter that it has got out of hand and become far too serious, as the "hobby Indians" spend their weekends dressing up in buckskin, camping in teepees and following a way of life and religion that they have only read about in books.

This is to be expected, really, in a tradition that dates from the 60 Wild West novels of Karl May, chronicling the adventures of Old Shatterhand and his faithful Indian companion, Winnetou. May, a prolific and imaginative writer who died in 1912, never travelled to the United States, but picked up his colourful accounts of Amerindian life from newspaper and magazine articles on the Plains Indians. A fact rather embarrassing for today's German "redskins" is that May was Hitler's *favourite author. Indian* clubs and the cult of the noble savage flourished under the Nazis.

The communist East Germans naturally distrusted May, but were attracted to Amerindian history for its propaganda value, demonstrating as it did American imperialism and racial oppression. Establishing tribes in East Germany was one of the old regime's most successful cultural programmes.

The Iroquois of Eiche were founded in the western suburbs of Potsdam. Children like to play Indians, and the Iroquois soon had teepees and a long house built behind the school. There were annual exchange meetings with the Cree, Dakota, Apache, Mandan, Hopi, Navajo, Blackfeet and Sioux. Today, the land on which the long house was built isn't community property any more, and the tribe will have to find new grounds along the banks of the River Spree.

Around the drab village of Eiche, Siegfried Seidel is still known as the "oberIndianer" from the days he worked as community coordinator for the local Iroquois. Seidel, 57, has long given up such activities, and thinks the whole movement has become "too kitsch"; but he is still proud of the Indian pottery and beads that the children copied from original designs. Some caught on to the Indian idea with a peculiar Germanic zeal, and in Seidel's view got carried away by deciding to set up chiefs and mimic the back-to-nature lives of the Indians, along with their religion. He broke with the movement in 1989.

With the collapse of the communist state, the movement has flourished and merged into the hippy(ish) movement of hobby Indians in western Germany. Flush with Deutschmarks, the East German braves now buy authentic Amerindian buckskin, turquoise and beads from western mail-order catalogues; in the old days, these had to be laboriously fashioned by hand from black-market materials.

Last year, some 6,000 Germans with 700 teepees had their 42nd annual powwow at Hessen, where feathered medicine men summoned up the Great Spirit while passing around the peace pipes.

The cult has also developed into a way of battling property speculators. In the grim East Berlin suburb of Prenzlauerberg, posters of Indians in front of teepees rally eastern Germans to defend their "indigenous culture" against the invasion of Wessies.

This year came news of "Indian" activity further north. According to Agence France Presse on 16 March, "Red Indians" living in the forests of Finland were to be expelled to Sweden. Police said that members of the group, who claimed to belong to the Canadian Mic Mac tribe, were not Indians, but a "sect or lifestyle". Most had French passports.

Two elderly French couples visited the camp to contact their daughters—both over 30—but the tribe withdrew into the forest and the parents were prevented from following. Police suspected that the "chief" was a Canadian-born swindler called Norman Williams.

*Paul Sieveking is editor of "Fortean Times"*



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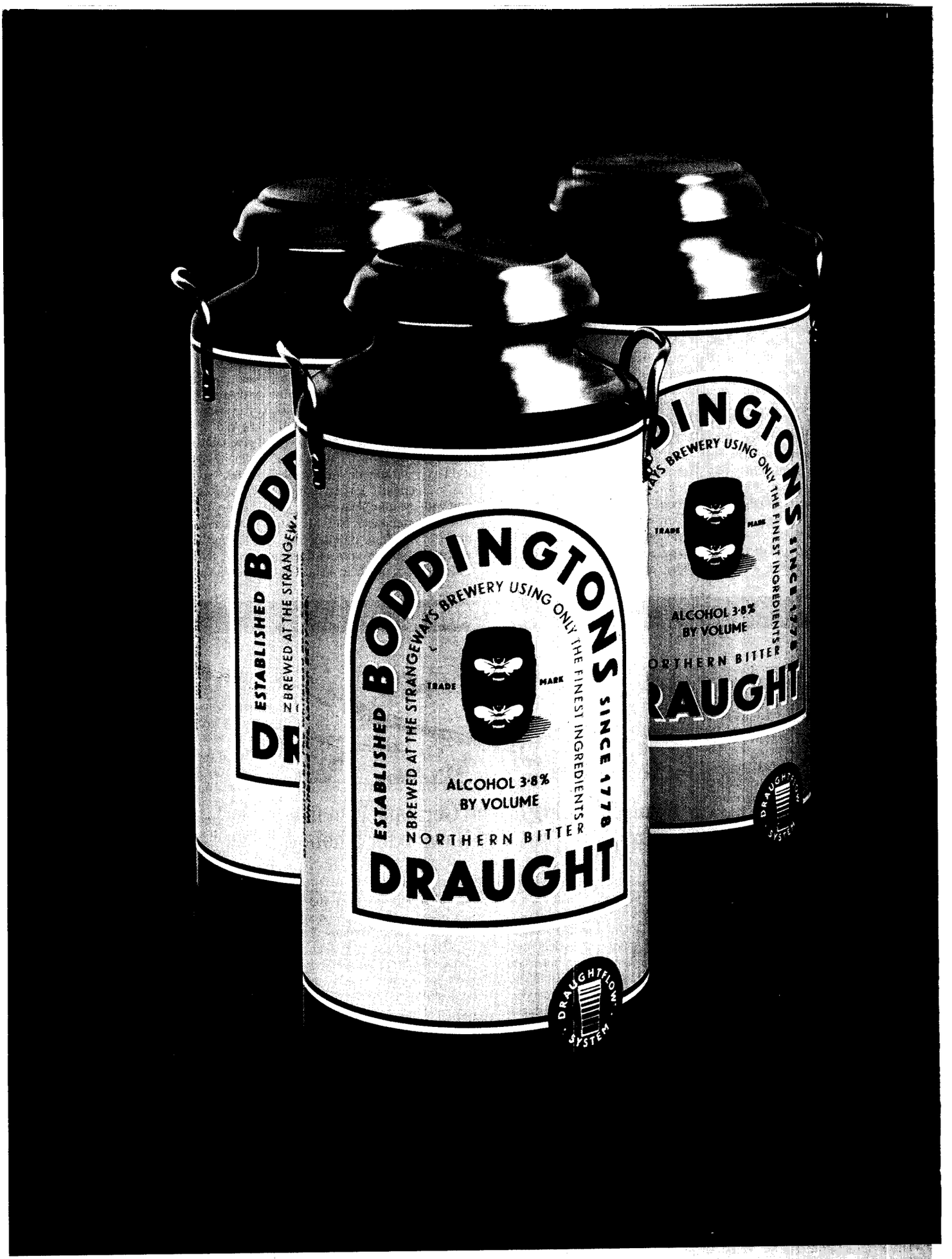


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